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ABOVE: Artist John Jude Palencar shares his nightmares with us in our Gallery beginning on page 62. COVER: A heroic warrior prepares to fight our darkest nightmares in artist Michael Whelan's "Storm of Wings."

REALMS OF FANTASY

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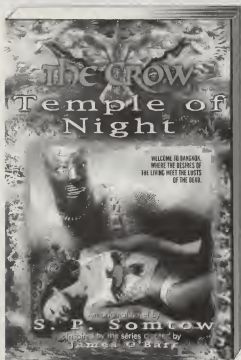
John Jude Palencar is an artist who finds himself caught between worlds.

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IT'S NOT OVER WITH DEATH . . . IT'S ONLY JUST BEGUN



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A Few Things I've Learned About You (And Me).

Those of you who are regular readers will remember that a couple of issues back I announced an editorial contest—it was pretty simple. Just write me no more than 1,000 words on the topic of your choice. So what, you may ask, have I learned? Well, first off, I've learned you are—for the most part—a bunch of slackers. Guess how many entries I got? Go on, guess!

Wrong. I got 15. That's it—15 entries from the whole bunch of you. I'm disappointed in all of you, and you all have detention for the rest of the month. Seriously, though, I am surprised at the lack of response. You don't seem to have any problem in sending letters expressing your dismay at the state of modern Fantasy, or about the stories I select, or about the covers, or the blurbs, or what you read last month. But now, when I ask you to expand a bit on your opinions, you all clam up. Go figure.

What I also learned is that those of you who aren't slackers are—for the most part—procrastinators. I got no fewer than five express mail envelopes on the very last day of the contest.

I learned, too, that those of you who got off their butts and did enter the contest had, by and large, interesting and useful information and opinions to impart. I will publish the First Prize winner in this issue and two runners-up in the next two issues.

What I learned about me is that I still have the capacity to be surprised and touched. The winning entry, *Jail Break*, by Scott P. Fleming, gives a whole new definition to "the literature of escape." I hope you enjoy it, and that you will enjoy your tomorrow a little bit more because of it.

Jail Break

by Scott P. Fleming

Why do we read Fantasy? Is it because of the magic? The monsters? How about the fantastic settings? Maybe a favorite hero or heroine? Well, I'm not going to presume to know the answer to "Why do we read Fantasy?" I can only speak for myself and hope that the majority of you agree. I read Fantasy to escape!

We all need to get away from our everyday lives and "escape" for a couple of hours to our favorite reading spot, find a comfortable position, and allow ourselves to roam

through a magical world of creative genius. A world completely perpendicular to our own mundane, stressful, noisy, overwhelming existence to a place where everything and anything is possible. A place where oppressive bosses, screaming children, bills, deadlines, and aching joints are left behind for all those people that have not discovered the joy of the magical vicarious journey that only Fantasy readers (and writers!) take each time a page is turned.

Of course, for those of us with this esoteric knowledge, we also know that books are not the only medium through which we can experience this freedom. Thanks to that anti-magical conception "technology," we can explore new worlds and characters through movies, television, audio books, video games, role-playing games, the Internet, and a slew of other media.

Though my choice of the term "escape" can be applied to anyone wanting to get away from the examples I cited above, my true inspiration was my life and the environment I live in: Prison.

I have been incarcerated since the age of seventeen. At that age I should have read several classic novels during my high school years, but I hadn't. In fact, I hadn't read a single novel from any genre. I could read, but I was of the opinion that the best books are made into movies. So, by my rationale, why read a book if I could enjoy it in a couple of hours on a television or movie screen? (For those of you shaking your heads, I'm shaking mine too as I look back embarrassed at my naivete.)

While going through the litigation process, I was bored without recourse. I was looking for anything to get my mind off the consequences of my actions. One day, while scanning the maybe thirty-book library available to me, I stumbled across a gem. Catching my eye was the 50th Anniversary Edition of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. Pictured on the cover was a reluctant Bilbo Baggins, Sting in hand, ready to act despite his inhibitions. The depiction triggered an early childhood memory of an animated movie of the same title. (Hopefully, some of the heads that were shaking earlier are now nodding at a similar memory.)

Following the chance discovery, I read *The Hobbit* for the first of many times. I was transported to another world, a magical setting, a Realm of Fantasy, if you please. The magic of

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REALMS OF FANTASY

VOLUME 6

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The life and times of the celebrated author
who wields the pen behind Pern!

Introduction

Cead mille Failte—a thousand welcomes, as they say here in Ireland. I've had the pleasure of greeting many of my readers at my house and while I'd love to greet each and every one of you, there'd be no time for writing—and you wouldn't want that!

So, for those that can't come here, and to free myself up for the serious task of writing, we decided to build you a scrapbook of tidbits and pictures. To let you get the feel of things, as it were. It's the same scrapbook we'll be showing my grandchildren as they get older.

I've asked my number-two son, Todd—the same Todd as in *Decision at Doona*—to do the work for me. It's nothing he hasn't done before. In fact, if anyone were to write about Pern, it'd be him.

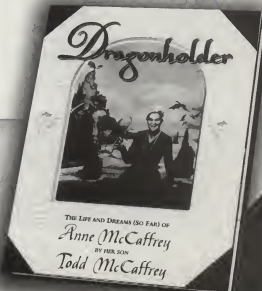
So settle back, put your feet up, don't mind the cat, and turn the page!

Anne McCaffrey
Dragonhold-Underhill
April 1999

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I saw the August ROF. Come on, Shawna, champions? So I came on a little hard. I always do, but please. Aren't you going to publish anyone that agrees with me? I miss the adventure in Fantasy/Adventure. I miss stories with action and drama that keep you hanging on the edge of your seat. I think classic Fantasy can use a resurgence. I've had enough fluff. Yes, *Chinatown* is a wonderful thriller, but sometimes you just want to see Douglas Fairbanks Jr. swinging from balcony to balcony or watch the Scarlet Pimpernel stick it to the bad guys. Hey, that's what made *Star Wars* a success.

Regards,
Brittany Thompson
Fullerton, CA

Patience! We are a bimonthly magazine. By the time responses have been received for an issue—the next issue has already “gone to press.” And while your initial letter struck quite a chord with our readers, it wasn’t any reason to “hold the press,” as we had lots of other interesting stuff to publish as well. So, by the time you read these replies ... there might be some snow on the ground for those of us in northern climes. That doesn’t mean we are ignoring you—it takes time for responses about a certain issue to trickle in, and there is that month interval between issues.

Dear Shawna McCarthy,

I strongly second Brittany Thompson's letter. Although, rather than the writers she listed, I might prefer "good stuff along the lines of" Edgell and Dunsany—tales of elegance and charm, "the grand, the noble, the Romantic" to quote Lord David Cecil's summary of C.S. Lewis. My favorite section is "Folkroots" (but please get back soon Terri Windling). Like Brittany, I applaud your art section and, as a self-styled Tory Luddite, I also feel airplanes do not belong in your magazine. ("Men should not be able to fly before they have become virtuous." Samuel Johnson.) I may grudgingly admit that "urban" Fantasy is a valid form, maybe even a necessary one, if Fantasy is to remain a viable, living genre. However, I dislike stories in which characters do things like ride motorcycles.

Sincerely,
M.B. Kuntz
Norristown, PA

Dear Shawna,

I am writing in regard to your delightful magazine, as well as in response to Brittany Thompson's letter. The breadth and diversity of literature that ROF offers is sheer joy. Perhaps what Ms. Thompson needs to understand is that not all Fantasy is about dragons

and magic. Fantasy is about exploration of the soul and what lays within. Whether that exploration takes place within the bloodied battlefields of WWII, or on the back of a dragon, or within the shadowed alleys of the city, it all conveys the same feeling ... exploration of the soul. So many of your stories explore this venue along so many different lines. In addendum, I found the story on Patton most intriguing, the author masterfully integrating the legendary general's temperament and notorious exploits with a thoughtful story line.

Keep the great stories coming,
Lauren Welch
Hemet, CA

Dear Shawna,

My ears pricked up when I heard your clarion call for champions in the August issue. I've read such letters as Brittany Thompson's before with frustration. If Fantasy fiction were limited to sword fights and spells that go boom, then we might as well stop reading altogether and play video games all day. Thompson's letter asked the question, where was the magic in "Secret in the Chest?" Well, come closer little one, I'll tell you. I'll whisper the grand secret you overlooked in that tale and, apparently, many others which have appeared in *Realms*: The story is the magic.

Fantasy is not necessarily a dream of the impossible. You don't have to drop a five-ton dragon on the reader's head to qualify the story as Fantasy. This is not Chemistry 101 where rules control the experiments that writers conduct. Elves, soul-drinking swords, and sages with white beards are not required to create a fantasy. If the title of the magazine were, say, "Bloody Realms of Sword-Swinging, Spell-Chanting, Pseudo-Medieval Heroic Fantasy..." then a narrow expectation of the stories would be reasonable.

Joao-Pierre S. Ruth
Piscataway, NJ

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I have chosen to be a champion, however poor ... Thompson's comment about the "American Plains" just plain annoyed me. I am, perhaps, taking it incorrectly. I think it was in reference to the stories with Native American themes. I can think of few better places to garner Fantasy tales than the richly mystical culture of many Native American tribes.

Danielle Creech

Dear Shawna and Brittany Thompson,

Katherine Kurtz has written a number of novels in her "Knights of Blood" and "Adept" series that all take place in the very

mechanized 20th century. She has also written a piece of so-called "WWII nonsense" called "Lammas Night." Robert E. Howard wrote lots of pulps and included Fantasy in the 15th ("Solomon Kane"), 19th ("The Gent from Bear Creek"), and 20th century (various Horror stories). As for "... prop airplanes don't belong within your pages ..." get Phillip Jose Farmer's "A Barnstormer from Oz" from the library.

And let me just mention a not-to-be-named, best-selling author who has re-written the Arthurian legend, crossed it with *Lord of the Rings* and carried it out into ad infinitum overly padded volumes ... is that what you want to read over again and again?

Ruth Dempsey
Rochester, NY

Apologies in advance to all the authors of the above letters whose words we were forced to edit and abbreviate so that everyone could get a few words in. We had quite an outpouring of thoughtful, eloquent, and lengthy responses to Ms. Thompson's letter.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

When I first read Brittany Thompson's letter in the August issue of ROF, I was ready to come charging to your defense. Then I thought further about what Brittany had said and decided that some valid criticisms were offered. The art of ROF is fine, yes, but let us have the cover painting match the contents a little more closely, please? As an example, the illustration for "How the Highland People Came to Be" would have made an excellent cover.

Then, there is the recycling of covers from TSR's *Dragon* magazine. I believe you should have something original! If you're going to keep buying old covers, at least get someone to write some stories based on them!

On "... feminist authors bagging on men ..." your audience is predominately female. I believe, as a consequence, stories with a feminist slant are to be expected. I do not think that you pick stories based on "How can we jerk the men's chains this month?" On the whole, I think you are doing an excellent job. I have offered my comments in the spirit of "constructive criticism." I hope you have seen them in that light.

Yours truly,
Curry A. Mosher
Wellsboro, PA

Your letters are welcome. Send them to: Letters to the Editor, Realms of Fantasy, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. Or better yet, E-mail to: shatnam896@aol.com

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BY AND LARGE THE MATERIAL DELIVERED ALONG WITH A REVIEWER'S COPY OF A BOOK IS pretty useless stuff. There's an upbeat letter written by some employee of the publisher which is usually so giddily positive about everything concerning the book that it gives the reviewer the strong impression that the writer is either on some highly desirable drug or that he or she is fresh from a weekend seminar with an extremely upbeat motivationalist guru. Then there is often a snappy plot summary (often giving away the ending) which is, of course, the last thing in the world a reviewer wants to be exposed to just before reading the work in hand, unless said reviewer likes to confine his professional reading to crib sheets.

And last there is a list of quotes from celebrities and reviewers concerning prior works by the author which only has the effect of pleasing or displeasing the reviewer depending upon whether or not his or her name is included.

The stuff Random House sent along with Peter Straub's *Mr. X* (Random House, NYC; 482 pages; hardcover; \$25.95) included a good amount of the kind of material mentioned above, but they also sent along a really neat

interview and I offer the interviewer my congratulations because it contains a number of comments by Straub, all of which are highly interesting, and many of which are extremely amusing. Straub makes a number of perceptive remarks that are most illuminating to anyone interested in the fantastic bizarre, such as yourself.

Straub starts off with some witty and understandably bitter comments on being tagged with a genre label, mentioning the fact that although his last books have all been mystery novels, reviewers have uncritically (pun intended) continued to describe them as Horror Fantasy stories, seeing them quite falsely as a continuation of the series of novels that followed his enormously successful *Ghost Story* and which did, indeed, explore supernatural themes. He has every right to complain about this, particularly because the most unfortunate aspect of this reflexive and inaccurate categorizing has been to conceal the fact that what he has actually been up to is creating and developing what I consider to be a daring exploration of entirely new possibilities in the field of the mystery story and that those novels were daring demonstrations of new techniques and approaches that workers in the area of the detective novel could and should ponder to their advantage. I sincerely hope that they have ignored the critics' superficial and inaccurate categorizing and done so.

Among the less pivotal but useful observations made is one which, if paid attention to, will be of enormous help to any would-be writers in the audience, not to mention being of value to many actually writing writers:

"Muses [are] ... like thugs, all ideas are the same so far as they're concerned ... [and therefore] ... 90% of inspirations, although genuine, are of no use at all ... [since] ... you can't tell which ones will work for you until you sit down and begin to write."

He also reveals a simple truth underlying the marvelous humor present in his approach to many of his best villains: "People who betray their suppressed anger, therefore their absurd self-importance, cannot help but be hilarious."

He also mentions the fascinating fact that his nightmare production increased during the period he abandoned writing Horror novels, then waned when he took them up again. The interview concludes with the intriguing observation: "Most of the ghosts I believe in are in stories."

People worldwide have read the *Dragonlance Chronicles*. With the release of the annotated edition, they can follow the path Weis and Hickman took to create the world of Krynn. Cover painting by Todd Lockwood.



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BOOKS TO WATCH FOR

Lord of the Fire Lands: A Tale of the King's Blades, by Dave Duncan, An engrossing tale in the sword-and-sorcery tradition. This story is the latest in Duncan's King's Blades saga. Graduates of Ironhall School, once-rebellious boys emerge as the finest swordsmen in the world, the King's Blades. Wasp is of a different ilk. The child of murdered parents, he is no rebel. The newly bound Sir Wasp is immediately thrust into peril and magic beyond what any other Blade has ever experienced. A tale that will lure you in with its cunning, and with its exotic saga of war and murder, friendship and betrayal.

Kronor the Betrayal: Book One of the Riftwar Legacy, by Raymond E. Feist, Avon Eos reprint paperback, \$6.99. Introduce yourself to the very first novel of the Riftwar Legacy, set in the world of Midkemia. This tale brings back many of Feist's most memorable creations. Meet again, Squire James (a k a master thief "Jimmy the Hand"), Prince Arutha, Pug the Magician, and Squire Locklear. Epic battles, invading armies, and a plot that is riddled with unexpected twists and turns make up this marvelous tale. Vintage Feist—ready to take the world by storm once more as he did with his debut novel *Magician*, published in 1982.

The River's Gift, by Mercedes Lackey, Roc hardcover, \$14.95. Meet 15-year-old Ariella, gifted with a healing power. Merod, a wondrous horse-like creature emerges from the river near the castle where Ariella and her father live. A friendship between the two is forged. When tragedy intrudes—the death of Ariella's beloved father and the shattering news that she must marry an unknown cousin—it is Merod who will use his greatest magic to create a destiny of love and freedom for his beloved small human. Author of the Owlflight and the Mage Wind series, Lackey has again created a wondrous tale of magical adventure.

Memoranda, by Jeffrey Ford, Avon Eos trade paperback, \$12.00. This book follows the World Fantasy Award-winning *The Physiognomy*. Called a "modern allegory" by *The New York Times* Book Review, this sequel is a prized addition to any collector of Ford's work. Cley returns in search of an antidote to a sleeping sickness that plagues the city of

Wenau. Searching for symbolic forms, aided by a demon, falling in love, and questing in the bizarre city make for a tale of power and madness. A surreal fantasy by an author who is frequently compared to Franz Kafka.

Judgment of Tears, by Kim Newman, Avon Books trade paperback, \$12.50. The third and final volume in the Alternate History of Dracula Trilogy. Rome, 1959: A city teeming with jet-setters, conspirators, swindlers and, of course, the undead. Count Dracula is set to be married and perhaps returned to his former position as Lord of the Undead.

Vampire lore combined with "a fine satirical bite" make this alternate history of Dracula an intense and necessary read for fans of Horror and Fantasy alike.

The Merlin of St. Gilles' Well, by Ann Chamberlin, Tor Books hardcover, \$23.00. Joan of Arc and Merlin cross paths in this poetic, mystical tale. A half-pagan, half-Christian world is the setting for this often-historically accurate novel.

The Cleft and Other Odd Tales by Gahan Wilson, Tor trade paperback, \$14.95. Realms' favorite book reviewer, Gahan Wilson, started publishing fiction in 1964. The best of his work is collected herein. The tales within this book have previously been published in such places as *Playboy Magazine*, *Omni*, and collections edited by Ellen Datlow, Terri

Winding, Harlan Ellison and Roger Zelazny. Also included are original Gahan Wilson illustrations. From the very first "odd" tale involving a scullery monk, a mountain monastery, and cleft ceremonies ... to tales that mix "nostalgia with unease" featuring Mandarins, sea gulls, frog princes, and casinos ... you will find yourself both captivated and unnerved. Hone your mind and imagination on these sharp-witted stories that include classic horror, thirties-style pulp science fiction, fairy tale characters, and the campfire-tale. And for those of Gahan's fans who appreciate the sheer artistry of his language (from "The Casino Migaro") ... "The ball, on the other hand, made an almost fiendishly penetrating kind of clatter which brought to mind the rappings of bony knuckles and the chattering of fever victims' teeth..." you have come to the right book. ♦



Note that "most"! The title character of Mr. X is a spectacular horror from the start and he grows increasingly more loathsome as the novel progresses.

Our most intimate contact with him is in the pages of his diary, which is essentially addressed to a bent version of the gruesome entities created by Howard Phillips Lovecraft (whom Mr. X reverently refers to as "the Providence Master") in his tales about monstrous but generally unsuspected cosmic beings of great, unholy power which have been secretly served and worshipped by mad minions through the centuries to the great detriment of the rest of us and to our poor old globe itself.

A very good example of how skillfully Straub positions this marvelously macabre creation on a veer "twist humor and horror is a curse of his we read, almost at the very start of this deadly wretch's crazed scribbles. My dearest hope is that your flesh should blister, that you should have to labor for the smallest gulps of air and feel individual organs explode within you, so on and so forth, your eyes to burst, that kind of thing."

But Mr. X's diary reaches its highest points of the ridiculous but utterly appalling when he inscribes in it his appeals, suggestions, and peevish complaints to the Lovecraftian gods. I think it's fair to say that these bits are among the funniest ghastly/hilarious stuff that Straub has ever written.

X believes—not without some justification, mind—that he is a mighty entity that has been fashioned by the devious machinations of Yog-Sothoth, Cthulhu, and various other main men of the abominable pantheon of monsters created back in the '20s when Lovecraft really hit his stride, and to those of us privy to the more delicate twistings and turnings of HPL's myth cycle, it is instantly obvious that poor Mr. X is a follow-up to the abortive creation of the tragic Wilbur Whateley, he of "The Dunwich Horror," whose mission it was to facilitate the entry of vast evil in order to first exterminate all earthly life forms, us humans very much included, and then go on to pulverize the



planet into the sort of rubble the waiting demon gods would find a pleasant and suitable environment.

But while Whateley—though he did complain a mite during the darker nights of his half-human soul—was by and large a trooper and soldiered on with a stiff upper lip, Mr. X is forever bitching to his deities. He seems to think they do nothing right, feels his services to them are vastly unappreciated, and is full of grotesque and detailed suggestions for them, such as those regarding the establishment of a museum celebrating himself which he feels should be erected upon what is left of our planet once it has been altered sufficiently to be a suitable habitat for the cosmic horrors he serves.

But do not be led by this into thinking that Mr. X is all hot air and bombast. Far from it, friends, he is as authentic and effective a fiend as they come and is—thanks to the twisted mind of his creator, Peter Straub—far more inventive and bone-chilling in his evil machinations than the vast majority of supervillains found in many a scary Fantasy that wishes it were this well written.

I refuse to make the smallest listing of his vile depredations since they are genuinely shocking and any forewarning might—if you will allow me to borrow somewhat from Mr. X's declamatory style—risk lessening the buggings of your eyes, the growing clamminess of your flesh, the increasing stirrings of

your hair... and we certainly wouldn't want that to happen, would we?

We are pulled into Mr. X's zone by following the quest of Ned Dunstan who has dropped everything in order to journey willy-nilly to the apparently insignificant town of Edgerton, Illinois because his mother is dying there.

Ned is a highly likable fellow but one draped in many mysteries. Our first glimpse of him is as a tiny child who developed the odd habit of looking behind him over his shoulder from the first time he learned to sit up. His mother tells the other Dunstans it is because he wants to see if his shadow has followed him into the house and this turns out to be eerily perceptive of her since this book is a brilliant variation on the disturbing notion of the *doppelgänger*—the double we are all said to have and which none of us is all that eager to meet because if you encounter yourself standing in front of yourself, you are then forced to seriously question who the you is who is seeing the you before you and that in turn may lead to the end of one or the other or the both of you, might it not?

Ned is forced to ask a lot of other questions of himself about himself when his return to his childhood turf gives him a chance to re-examine his family with the eyes of a grownup. He finds that his new perspective allows him to observe, for starters, that the Dunstans are a good deal odder than he

thought and this slowly deepens into a creepy realization that they are very strange, indeed. The final and most awesome revelation is the weird discovery that he is a true-blue Dunstan as his explorations of various strangenesses in himself activate increasingly scary abilities he never knew he owned.

Even Edgerton itself (note the "edge" in Edgerton) turns out to be spookily unique and to contain mysteries wrapped around mysteries with many seriously appalling dangers folded in along with them. But even though the very structure of the place adds to its lethality, in the end the town itself—in an interesting variation on the *doppelgänger* effect—aids and abets our hero (or is it heroes?) in tracking down its final hidden ghastliness which, I assure you, is a pip.

This may well be the best and most effectively complex of Straub's Horror stories yet (yes, Virginia and mainstream reviewers—this is a Horror story) and it would be a great shame if you missed it. So don't

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, by J.K. Rowling; Scholastic Press, NYC; 341 pages; hardcover; \$17.95

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, by J.K. Rowling; Scholastic Press, NYC; 435 pages; hardcover; 19.95

I find it fascinating and more than a touch humiliating that the first review on the first book of the Harry Potter series only appeared in this magazine in the issue just now on the

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stands as I write. I find it personally interesting—and hopefully (for my future's sake) highly instructive—that the blindingly obvious idea of reviewing the series did not suddenly occur to me until shortly before that issue came out.

Amazing how one can be obsessively interested in a subject (Fantasy, for example), even make a wee bit of one's income from writing a column about it (all of one's income, actually, if you throw in the cartoons, the odd short stories, and the so far almost-entirely-unseen film and TV work) and still take so long to pay serious attention to what is, without any possible doubt whatsoever, the most spectacularly successful work of literary Fantasy in decades and one that will doubtless end up being as much a major marker of its era as Tolkien's Ring Trilogy was of the late 'fifties and the 'sixties.

Without the slightest possibility of a doubt, the reader (unless he or she has been imprisoned in some dank *oubliette* of Azkaban) has already read of the novels concerning young Harry Potter in supposedly non-Fantasy-oriented publications such as *Time* magazine or *The New York Times* and/or observed favorite TV anchor persons expound (sometimes with vaguely puzzled expressions on their pretty faces, to be sure) and is well aware that they concern the doings of a lad who was a more-than-slightly-miserable nerd orphan with thick glasses on his nose and a jagged scar disfiguring his forehead, who was suddenly freed from the cruel domination of his loathsome foster family when he received the news he was actually the son of a mother and father who had been mighty magic workers slain by an remarkably evil wizard; that he had demonstrated as a mere babe that he was himself possessed of awesome powers by profoundly crippling the wizard when the creature had attempted to kill him after slaying his parents; that he would finally be able to escape the vile Dursley family of number 4 Privet Drive in London which had zealously hidden all the above from the poor child in an effort to turn him into a "normal" nonmagical slob known in this Fantasy world as a Muggle, such as they were themselves; and that he would be warmly welcomed as a student at the legendary Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry.

There is more than a good chance the reader also knew way before us experts here at *Realms* did that the author of this phenomenon in our special field, J.K. Rowling, is a single mother living in Scotland who was in love with writing from childhood but who got more or less nowhere with her struggles in that highly resistant art form until she had a bright epiphany on a train either going to or coming from London (I still haven't absorbed all of this!) and in large part developed the essential story line, characters, and major notions as one golden inspiration after another poured down upon her. The story has become a literary legend right up there with the one about L. Frank Baum staring

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blankly at the label on the second drawer of his filing cabinet (O-Z) and then suddenly coming up with the Emerald City and all its brightly colored dominions.

My guess is that the Edinburgh-to-London train run these days is packed to the walls with intense folk hunched over notepads (a big mistake, that, as J.K.R. did not have any writing material so all those glorious notions could brew and enrich one another in her skull until she managed to dash to her flat) and suddenly exclaiming (or muttering, depending on their personal inclinations) things like "Ravens instead of owls!" or "Maybe I could call it Flippitch!" as they undergo brief flare-ups of hope, most of them quickly dimming into moody realizations that they have not yet managed to put their foot on the first step of the stairway to best-seller paradise. I blushing confess I have found myself on the Hampton Jitney having unconsciously scribbled highly Potter-like material (of course I would never do such a thing consciously) into my notebook and I'd bet a Galleon to 20 Knuts I have spotted scribbles in nearby seats playing the same dodgy game.

Whatever, I have finally gotten around to reading all of the available books and I must confess that, along with umpty-thousand kids and grownups in bookstore lines, I have myself been highly entertained by them all and am looking forward to the arrival of the fourth. The series is every bit as amusing as advertised, the world presented has the sort of convincing solidity and coherency that are so particularly needed in this kind of wacky Fantasy, and characters do indeed inspire continuing interest. My favorite among those characters so far, and the one I am most especially curious to see what happens to, is Ginny Weasley, a really hilarious study of the embarrassed agonies of early adolescence, who is so hopelessly and burningly smitten with Harry that she can't help doing everything absolutely wrong when she's in his presence.

The most significant sociological aspect of the series is how casually it has completely derailed the smugly doomish sayings of a whole other bunch of experts who have been steadfastly maintaining that any possibility of the survival of the love of books has been thoroughly and permanently vaporized by the arrival of the fantastical wonders and amazements of hi-tech diversions and that the excitement of reading was henceforth a thing of the past. The Potter books have conclusively proven that all this was obviously bunkum and total hogwash. All that the kids those grownups were shaking their heads over were doing was waiting for something to come along that appealed to them.

A particularly interesting aspect of this last point is that the novels written by Rowling are often not all that easy to read. There are numerous passages of highly satisfying, rip-roaring action to be sure; there are plenty of kid-bawdy jokes involving staunch standbys of juvenile humor such as snot and smelly



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human excretions, but there are also quite a few hard bits where the rush of events grinds to a halt as the characters carefully review and analyze what led up to their present predicament or what might be the varying results on the future from taking this or that option. And not all that rarely the books' headlong pace will quieten into very serious (and I think likely helpful) ponderings on the intellectual or moral implications of such and such an event. Not at all the sort of stuff one might put into a book planned to be a sure-fire, ring-tailed baboon of a best-seller for kids.

In interviews Rowling is often made to appear to claim that her books were not designed as children's books, but when you actually analyze her statements it seems to me what she's really doing is expressing her dislike at books being shoved into age ghettos, an attitude with which I totally concur.

She is wise enough to respect the kids, to include them into the human race along with adults, and therefore feels no compulsion against handing them the challenges they deserve. She expects them to have the sense to pause and think and she is not in the least afraid to offer them puzzles that can only be solved by pondering painful truths about human interactions.

I believe one beneficial spinoff of the little teachings in these books might be not only their helpfulness in enabling kids to better understand themselves, but they could even grant them insights that just might possibly

lead to the sort of increased understanding that would inspire genuine empathy for those tottering ruins commonly called adults. They might even—and here I freely admit I'm getting carried away—help them manage those grownups a little more knowledgeably and thereby guide them gently into becoming better grownups than they otherwise might have been.

One can only hope.

The Annotated Chronicles, by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman; TSR; Renton, WA; 1,315 pgs; Hardback; \$34.99

Two staples for any impressionable child hellbent on reading fantasy should be Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and Weis and Hickman's *Dragonlance Chronicles*, *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*, *Dragons of Winter Night*, *Dragons of Spring Dawning*.

Yes, they're that good.

Fifteen years ago a group of friends stumbled upon something wonderful. They were unlikely heroes set to the most unlikely of tasks: restore faith and healing to a broken world. And I love each and every one of them for bringing me along on a journey overflowing with excitement, magic, friendship, faith, love, valor, greed, struggle, and above all, Fantasy.

The group of friends to which I'm referring could be the companions from the Trilogy: Tanis Half-Elven, Sturm Brightblade, Raistlin and Caramon Majere, Goldmoon, River-

wind, Flint, Tika, Laurana, Kitiara, and yes, even Tasslehoff Burrfoot. Or, I could be talking about Margaret Weis, Tracy Hickman, and all the other wonderful writers, designers, and artists at TSR who breathed life into these characters (not to mention the genre).

But, of course, I'm talking about both groups.

I am happy to announce that they're back. All of them. And they're offering a reprint of the *Chronicles Trilogy*, bound together and specially annotated, for those of you who fancy yourselves the type of Fantasy readers who love (or need) to travel every inch of road, know every detail down to individual spell components, and how the creators massaged a world's evolution using nothing more than their imaginations and a lot of hard work.

The Annotated Chronicles is a virtual fountain of fascination. Name etymology, backgrounds on idea creation, developmental tidbits, preliminary character and race sketches, little factoids from the creators that sometimes seem apropos of nothing, and (oh yeah), the full text from *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*, *Dragons of Winter Night*, and *Dragons of Spring Dawning*. It's all there. A bit like Pop-Up Video, with neither the "pop-up" nor the "video." Just juicy, behind-the-scenes commentary.

The Annotated Chronicles makes a perfect addendum to any *Dragonlance* reader's collection or any fan of Krynn's companions who dares to say he or she knows it all. ♦



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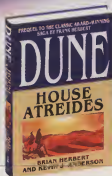
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BY RESA NELSON

Angel makes us ask: Why do bad boys make us feel so good?

I BELIEVE THERE IS GOOD AND BAD IN EVERYONE. I BELIEVE THAT EACH OF US IS CAPABLE OF performing great acts of kindness, compassion, and love—and that each of us is equally capable of committing murder and other acts of brutality. Being a good human being is a matter of choice. And it is the choices—both good and bad—that we make every day that define who we are. I believe that the best and most interesting people are those who look deep inside themselves as often as they can stand it. They are the ones who examine their actions with an honest eye and question whether or not they did the right thing. They are the ones who live their lives as an ongoing process of sin and redemption.

In that case, I believe that one of the best and most interesting characters on television is Angel: A more than two hundred year-old vampire who is struggling with the question of what it means to be a decent human ... or, rather, a decent being.

Fans of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* are already well acquainted with Angel (played by David Boreanaz) as Buffy's former love interest, and the premiere episode of *Angel* provided the background for those who aren't: Hundreds of years ago, Angel was such a fierce vampire that other vampires feared him. But then gypsies cursed him by restoring his human soul. Although Angel is still a vampire, he's one who's filled with guilt and remorse for his past actions. Although he's in love with Buffy, the act of sex drives him to kill—therefore, his best choice is celibacy. Even worse, he can't be around Buffy without endangering them both. And so Angel has

moved from Buffy's world of the fictional Sunnydale, California to L.A.

Angel's intent is to atone for his sins by helping people. At the same time, he's fighting his natural craving for human blood. His original game plan is to isolate himself from others in an effort to keep temptation at bay.

As Angel succinctly puts it, "I'm not good with humans."

He's not kidding. Angel's awkward when he tries to relate to people. He's clumsy and shy. He's lonely.

Enter Doyle (played by Glenn Quinn), a character who is half-human. He's been sent by the "powers that be" to aid Angel. Unfortunately for Doyle, these powers communicate to him by way of sending him visions that are linked with a sudden migraine.

Doyle admonishes Angel for cutting himself off from the people he's trying to help. Doyle insists that Angel's true mission is to atone for his sins not just by protect-

ing people, but by reaching out to them. The idea is that if Angel can let people into his heart, he may be able to save souls, possibly including his own.

Add a dash of Cordelia Chase (played by Charisma Carpenter), a crossover character from *Buffy*, and you have something that resembles a vampire detective agency. "I don't know if they'll be doing infomercials," quips consulting producer Marti Noxon. "Sometimes people will come to them. Sometimes Doyle's visions will lead Angel to where he needs to be. Certainly one of the comedic aspects will be Cordelia's desire to make this a viable business. We didn't want to make it *Touched By a Different Angel*."

Joss Whedon created *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* because he was interested in the idea of an empowered young woman who lives in an American society where women are typically not given the opportunity to fight their own fights. So while Buffy

Charisma Carpenter, David Boreanaz, and Glenn Quinn stars in *Angel*.





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exists as a strong role model for women, where does Angel fit in?

"When we started talking about Angel [as a spinoff series]," Noxon says, "definitely part of the excitement of that was finding even more adult situations."

"I think we're going to do two things. As in *Buffy*, we use monsters as metaphors. One of the classic examples is one of the earlier episodes [of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*] where in *Buffy's* school, one of the girls is ignored and cast out because she's unpopular. Then one day she literally becomes invisible. And then she becomes a menace, because she's so angry and hurt over being outcast. Those are the kinds of stories we've been telling on *Buffy*."

"The other direction is, just like on *Buffy*, we want to start creating this universe of characters ... and to get emotionally interested in their relationships. It won't be quite as much of a serial. We want to create an ongoing drama."

Fans of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* can probably make the transition from *Buffy* to *Angel* pretty easily. After all, they're used to monsters cropping up in everyday life. Fans are already familiar with Angel's past. They've seen him through *Buffy's* eyes. They know him, at least in the setting of Sunnydale.

So it must have been easy for the creators to throw together the *Angel* series, right?

Guess again.

"The biggest challenge, probably from a creative viewpoint ... was to assume we had such a strong take on [the characters in *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*], and because we'd been



The very definition of a smoldering gaze.

working together on the show for so long, [creating the *Angel* series] would just sort of flow. That it wouldn't be a real painstaking process to get a new show off the ground. I think that was just naive of everybody. The reality is it's just a tremendous amount of work. It takes a while to find your footing, to figure out what's working, what isn't working. I don't know if Joss and David felt that way, but I certainly did."

One of the most interesting differences between the *Buffy* series and the *Angel* series

is the setting. *Buffy's* Sunnydale is a fictional town in which a portal between our reality and a world of monsters exists. As the *Buffy* series has progressed, Sunnydale has been able to provide whatever was required because the creators were literally making it up as they went along.

Because *Angel* is set in Los Angeles, a certain degree of reality creeps in. We're no longer talking about a small, make-believe town where anything can happen. We're talking about an existing city and the speculation of what its seamy underside might really mean. In the premiere episode, *Angel* faces a fellow vampire who is a successful businessman—a vampire who goes to work, earns a living, and pays his taxes, and who explains that his model-citizen behavior buys him the right to do as he pleases after dark. Most recently, doing as he pleases translated into killing a human friend in the making of *Angel's*—with Cordelia next in line. In an act of revenge, *Angel* interrupts a business meeting to kill this model-citizen vampire. Just after *Angel* exits the meeting, the dead vampire's corporate lawyer places a call on his cell phone. The lawyer calmly informs the party on the other end of the line that there is a new player in town—meaning, *Angel*. The lawyer listens for a moment, then gives his opinion that it's not yet necessary to inform the senior partners of this event.

This casts Los Angeles in an unusual light that is oddly believable.

"Los Angeles was the one place that Joss picked for very specific reasons," Noxon says. "It's a town with so many different

WHAT ABOUT BUFFY?

If you're a fan of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, what kind of crossover can you expect to see between *Buffy* and *Angel*? First, the two series will be sharing characters to a certain extent.

"Seth Green—the Oz character on *Buffy*—I think he appears in episode 3 of *Angel*," Marti Noxon says. "One thing you'll probably see is the return of Faith. I don't know if she'll be going just to *Buffy* or to *Angel*."

For those who have been watching, you may have seen the back-to-back crossover shows, scheduled (at press time) to air just before Thanksgiving. In the 8 PM time slot, *Angel* returned to appear on *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. In the 9:00 PM slot, *Buffy* made a guest appearance on *Angel*.

One of the reasons why *Angel* was spun off as a companion series is that the relationship between *Buffy* and *Angel* had reached its limits. "They'd broken up, he'd gone to Hell, he went bad, he'd come back from Hell," Noxon explains. "They'd had sex, and that didn't go very well—it turned him evil—it's a really long story."

The *Angel* series was conceived with the thought that separating the characters into their own shows would not just revitalize *Buffy*, but it would also provide an outlet for stories that could not be told on *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. There were certain stories that wouldn't quite fit for *Buffy* that can now be told in *Angel's* world.

The creators of the two shows are also finding subtle ways to connect them.

Sharp-eyed viewers of *Angel's* premiere episode were treated to his don't-blink-or-you'll-miss-it phone call to *Buffy*. Like many former lovers fresh from a break-up, *Angel* dials *Buffy's* number. Maybe he just wants to hear the sound of her voice. Maybe he just misses her. Maybe he intends to say something. He listens as the phone rings. She answers. He says nothing. Then Doyle enters the room, and *Angel* quickly hangs up, as if not wanting anyone to know he had a moment of weakness.

"If you watched *Buffy*," Noxon says, "she answered the phone in the premiere



episode of *Buffy*, at her mom's house. She doesn't hear anything on the other end of the line and hangs up. It's for the real die-hard fans."

Although it's a very subtle moment, it's an emotionally charged one. Let's hope there are more to come. ■

Resa Nelson

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characters. So many different flavors. There's a lot of preconceptions about what the city is about, but there's also a lot of truths. It's a pretty competitive, pretty intense town. There's a lot of pretty intense people. Certainly the monsters are going to be creatures who feed off that energy and are gonna take advantage of the weak. It's a place where a lot of isolated, lonely, and somewhat desperate people end up.

"It's a good place for monsters."

And just as the settings differ, so does the mythology of each series. As *Angel* develops, so will its characters and the secrets that they carry. Take Doyle, for example, who is half-human and half-... something else.

"He is a character who's hiding things," Noxon says. "As you get to know him better, there's [more information] revealed about him."

"One of the things about the *Angel* universe is that you have to open it up. In the same way that the mythology of *Buffy* wasn't entirely clear when you started watching the show, the *Angel* mythology will get clearer over time. But that's some of the fun: getting people to watch so they can figure it out. There's definitely going to be more answers."

One question being answered is that of exactly who *Angel* is. One reason why the decision was made to spin *Angel* off into his own series was that his relationship with *Buffy* had been explored to its limits. But another reason was because of David Boreanaz himself.

"We felt we had a real star in David," Noxon says. "He's exceptional in television. The only other person I know who has this kind of magnetism as a male lead is George Clooney. [Boreanaz] has star quality. I think the WB knew they had something in him."

In addition to her work on *Angel*, Noxon is also a supervising producer of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, as well as one of its writers. So she's well acquainted with vampires.

"I'm personally in love with the vampire lore and have always been. And I think that the character *Angel* is a wildly sexy man. I think David Boreanaz is the right guy to play that part."

A scene in the premiere episode was based loosely on a real event in Boreanaz's life. *Angel* goes to a Hollywood party. An agent spots him and assumes that he's an actor. The agent hands over his business card and informs *Angel* that he will be representing him as soon as he gives him a call.

"Something very similar happened to David. His manager saw him washing his car or walking the dog, and went up to him and said, 'I'm going to represent you.' [Although Boreanaz was already an actor], his discovery was very much like that."

Once the decision was made to spin *Angel* off into his own series, the next step was to explore his character. "It's a tremendous challenge to find [the characters'] voices. I think one of the biggest challenges was that



Wanna go out for a night on the town?

Angel was really kind of stoic on *Buffy*. He didn't talk a lot. He certainly didn't show a tremendous sense of humor. He was usually pretty straightforward. And trying to open up the character without [making viewers wonder], 'Who's this guy?' And giving him more range. It's a great credit to David, the actor, but also to Joss and David Greenwalt, who created the show, that they've been doing that so slowly."

An interesting thing is happening. As the creators of *Angel* open up his character, they are tapping into contemporary adult problems. For example, a few decades ago, a fairly simple formula for the typical happy American life was as follows: You marry your high school or college sweetheart, you have children, the husband is the breadwinner, and the wife stays home to raise the kids. It was straightforward and easy. And for those who didn't marry their high school or college sweethearts, there was still a chance to find a mate before the age of 30, after which men often turned into confirmed bachelors and women resigned themselves to being old maids.

After the turmoil of the 1960s, women's liberation complicated things in the 1970s. Women began to work. The stigma of divorce began to fade. Everything changed.

Some people still marry the sweethearts they met while in school. But the formula has shifted more into the realm of waiting until you're older to get married. Waiting until you're older to have children. When people get married fresh out of college, their elders tend to smile knowingly and murmur, "First marriage," with the air of certainty that it's something destined to fail.

One of the common patterns in our brave new world is that if you don't end up marrying someone you met in school, you join the sea of singles in the workplace. If you're lucky, you eventually meet someone at work

or at a party or while you're doing volunteer work. If you're not, you become more and more aware of just how difficult it can be to meet other single people. Although some people reluctantly join dating services, most prefer to live their lives and hope that sooner or later the right person will naturally drift across their path.

It can be a long and lonely process. If you're shy, as many people are to one degree or another, it's an especially difficult process. If you have a hard time connecting with people, it can seem impossible.

Angel symbolizes the single people in American society who feel alone. He is wracked with guilt for all of the people he has victimized in his past. He's afraid of getting too close to anyone, because it places him too close to the temptation of human blood. He doesn't know how to talk to people. He struggles to carry on a simple conversation. He stumbles and becomes especially awkward around women.

Doyle's directive for *Angel*—to let humans into his heart—is a tall order. As illustrated at the end of the second episode, *Angel* would much rather sit alone in the dark. It's comfortable and familiar for him. But he's willing to go out among people and try to find a way to reach out to them.

"*Buffy* is definitely aimed at a younger audience," Noxon says. "Although we do really well with women 18 to 35. It's one of our strongest demographics. I think it's because *Buffy* is an exciting role model for women, and the show is very emotional. I think that a lot of people focus on the supernatural aspects of the show, but [it] is very much a melding of demonology and supernatural stuff and kind of classic melodrama. It's sort of *Party of Five* meets *Anne Rice*."

Noxon explains that *Angel* is aimed at an audience in their twenties: "People who are potentially out of college and making their way in the big city."

"We definitely noticed in our premiere episode we had a much stronger male audience [than *Buffy*'s audience], and we want to stay true to that."

[*Angel*] has to aspire toward the entertainment level, first of all. [The show] always strikes me as funny, and it always strikes me as imaginative, but definitely we aspire to ask the bigger questions.

"One of the main things that drives people is to figure out why we're here and what our purpose is. At the same time, we have kick-ass monsters and good Kung Fu," elaborates Noxon.

"[*Angel*] has what I have come to think of as the 'Whedon touch.' It is a very strong genre piece. It's a supernatural action series. At the same time, it is touched by a really deft sense of humor ... and a real strong emotional core."

Using the early episodes of *Angel* as a sign of things to come, I'd say that the Whedon touch has more than a little bit of magic to it. ■

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Abduction and Ascension— two sides of the same coin?

IS IT NOT ENOUGH FOR ONE OF US TO SEE AN ANGEL, IN ORDER FOR ALL OF US TO BELIEVE IN the other Angels?"—*Paracelus*. Nineteen eighty-seven was a watershed year in UFO studies. *Communion: A True Story* was published in the spring and, for the first time, an abduction narrative purporting to be true became a mainstream best-seller. Although its author, Whitley Strieber, was quickly the center of controversy regarding the authenticity of his account and the nature of his motives (largely because he had been paid a million-dollar advance), the field has never been quite the same. Whether or not the narrative was true, it introduced the alien-abduction narrative as a major theme in popular culture ... something that earlier accounts had never quite been able to accomplish.

the public eye, he returned with a more comprehensive story that built on the rather literal-minded rhetoric of *Communion*. What he did was to draw on concepts that had been introduced 20 years earlier by the French ufologist, Jacques Valee, in *Passport to Magonia: From Folklore to Flying Saucers*.

In 1992, Strieber wrote the Foreword to Kenneth Ring's *The Omega Project: Near-Death Experiences, UFO Encounters, and Mind at Large*. By then, he was already referring to his "alien abduction" in quotation marks and suggesting (though somewhat implicitly) that the abduction phenomenon was mental and not physical. But Strieber seems to have remained rather ambivalent because in 1994, in an essay called "Communion: Ten Years After," he posed the following questions: "Given that the visitors are physical, what are they? Aliens? Some sort of new step in evolution? Beings from another reality? Demons or angels?" These are all questions that had been circulating in academic ufology for some time; Strieber reflected the debate on and off, from divergent points of view.

If *Communion* had been a work of fiction brilliantly and deceptively marketed as fact, then Strieber had been forced to immerse himself in his subject and become the

person he had purported to be. Like thousands of others, he became subject to *Communion's* impact on the collective consciousness. Afterward, in his writings, he showed the kind of vacillation that is typical of people and cultures trying to deal with new phenomena that threaten to challenge the basic foundations of a cultural world-view.

Resonant narratives like *Communion*, particularly when they have a high truth claim, have an immediate and deep impact on culture, particularly when they are presented at receptive times such as the turn of a millennium when ideas are at a point of convergence. (James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy*, published in 1993, is



The mythic origins of aliens and angels are similar. Above, the angels of pre-Raphaelite artist Sir Edward Burne-Jones and right, TV aliens from *The X-Files*.

Strieber, who was a well-established writer of Fantasy fiction before the publication of *Communion* with works like *Wolfen* and *The Hunger* to his credit, suffered both the positive and negative effects of his celebrity with a very interesting progression of follow-ups to *Communion*. After a long withdrawal from





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another example, though it was clearly a work of fiction.) Strieber served as a transition point in UFO studies, laying a popular culture groundwork for the next generation in the discourse about aliens, and in so doing, he looped the cultural imagery back on itself. By straddling the fence on the issue of whether aliens were physical or not, and then by putting aliens in the same discourse as angels, he took two symbols that seem at first to be in radically opposite categories and pointed at ways in which they were actually of common, if not identical, origins. Valee and other scientists had tried to accomplish this in the '60s without success, but once Strieber was on the scene, abduction narratives and angelic encounters seemed to be everywhere.

To give an example of how quickly the imagination responds to resonant images, let me digress for a moment and give an example from my own experience. This is how I was affected by these convergent symbols only a year after the publication of *Communion*.

The summer of 1988. A time-share a few miles from Yosemite Valley with three other people, including my wife, Anne. We had driven for several hours to get there, and we were tired, so went to bed around midnight



Classic images like this engraving of an encounter with an angel are similar to modern encounters with aliens from other worlds.

(which is generally early for us). I fell quite quickly into a deep sleep and woke up in the early morning with my mind spinning, so full of dream imagery that I didn't quite know where to begin thinking about it. At around seven, while the others were still asleep, I quickly wrote down my dream accounts before the images could dissolve. (I

had been practicing lucid dreaming for the past three years, so my techniques for recall were very good.) I jotted only notes for the six or seven other dreams, but for the one that included the abduction I did a more thorough narrative, from which I quote below:

"Trying to hide in the rubble of a factory building. Water around me, a waterfall in the distance with an old mill building above it. Lots of red brick. In the night horizon is the skyline of the city. Building that looks vaguely like the top of the Seattle Space Needle, but squat. A revolving restaurant?"

"Other people also around, hiding. Occasionally, a beam of blue-white light will shoot down from the night sky and carry people up. I have to change position and go out into the open. Hit by a beam. I'm flying, disoriented, changed into something formless. Then I'm in a hangar-like place inside a spaceship manned by lizard people. They're segregating the humans into groups—sort of cutting them like cattle into different hallways. There's a black staff (looks like wrapped leather) at the junction of two halls, and it's telling people which way to go. Wants me to go to one place (which looks like diner booths) where I will be separated from Anne. I refuse. Tension. Some

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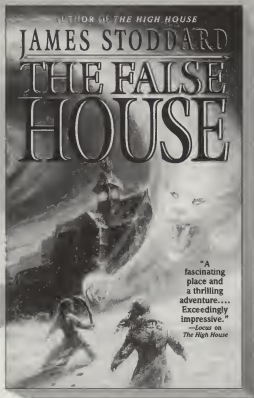


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police figure about to be called, and I find a way to trick the staff.

"I end up in a place where people are being trained to go back down and introduce knowledge to the humans—things like the true history of the planet, technical subjects, etc. Each particular discipline or category comes in a clear plastic tube with a hypodermic needle on each end. You take it out of its plastic wrapper and stick a needle in each side of your neck, injecting yourself with a blood-like substance that contains the information. It enters your memory, and then you can teach it to other humans. My tube contains history.

"At some point, people are being brainwashed or reprogrammed. I don't want to be part of the process. Find some way to enter a room that looks like a galley. They're beaming things down, and I leap through the door of what looks like a microwave oven. Spinning, disorientation, and I wake up cold, curled on cobblestones in some Canadian city. Toronto? Montreal? I'm crouched, naked, by the front fender of a police car, and I'm thinking, 'Should I go to the police?' I realize they'll never believe me. Probably arrest me for vagrancy. I've managed to keep my dose of history. Get up and stumble off and a passer-by notices me. He recognizes that I've just returned from an abduction."

The dream, as most of you will know, is a slight variation on the classic abduction narrative. There's nothing at all that remarkable about it, and ironically, like Strieber's narrative or the seminal abduction narrative of Betty and Barney Hill (whose case actually initiated the field of inquiry), there's no significant image that can't be accounted for by quickly examining Science Fiction films and novels. You don't even have to go to purportedly true abduction narratives to get the appropriate imagery.

In the late '80s I was a graduate student in cultural anthropology, and as part of my interdisciplinary social science training, I took courses designed to complement my areas of study. One of these courses was a cognitive psychology seminar taught by Charles Tart, author of the seminal work *Altered States of Consciousness*. Tart, at that time, was one of the very few professional academics still seriously researching phenomena like ESP; in his class, which was actually a seminar on the works of Carlos Castaneda (taught as cognitive psychology probably to make it acceptable at the university), I focused on the topic of dreams in Castaneda's collected body of work. To make a long story short, by the following year I was deeply immersed in a range of subjects that, until that time, I hadn't realized were closely related: Lucid dreaming, out-of-body experiences (i.e., astral projection), remote viewing, near-death experiences, channeling, past-life regression, shamanic journeying, angelic visions and, finally, alien abductions. It was while I was still immersed in such topics that I had my abduction dream.

Later that summer, in another semilucid dream, I accidentally stumbled onto Heaven. I hadn't intended to go there, but I must have made a wrong turn somewhere, because there I was—in the place that has become generically familiar to all of us: Brightly lit, Greek columns, an amphitheater, vivid blue sky, people in white robes. It was just sort of having angels harping on their personal clouds.

I'm not making light of this place—the reason I describe Heaven in these clichéd images is because those are what my mind provided when I first remembered the experience. When I returned to the memory and focused more closely on the specific, concrete details, what I recalled was something much more abstract (or perhaps more concrete?). That place did not really have any spatial dimensions, nor was it inhabited by people in white robes. It was more like a sort of solar system of energy bodies circulating around a brilliant consciousness. Part of my mind was fine with this, but another part had to replace these unfamiliar details with things I conventionally associated with Heaven. (And this much to my disappointment, since I find this sort of *Heaven Can Wait* kind of Heaven to be entirely boring. You can see a version of it in the recent Xerox commercials if you're curious.)

In any case, I found myself wandering around at the edge of the amphitheater where, beyond the columns, some sort of important lecture was going on. The figures in white robes were there to learn something. They were attending a seminar (probably about what it meant to be dead, or something equally predictable in this sort of scenario). I was lucid in this dream, so I was making up my mind whether to attend this lecture (which I imagined would be rather tedious given how bored the attendees looked) or whether to continue wandering around, when I was discovered by a member of Heaven's Security Force.

It was an angel, complete with wings and some long object, that I took to be the shaft of a trumpet. Suddenly I found myself unable to move. The angel descended on me, and after I was immobile, it said to me, "You do not belong here. You are not meant to hear these things yet." At that moment I looked at myself and discovered that I had no body. I was just a ball of energy. And yet I also did have a body, because the angel lifted me out of it by my heels, and carried me up into the sky of this Heaven, which grew darker and darker by degrees. As the angel carried me up and away from Heaven, I heard The Celestial Music. I instantly knew what it was—a single note sung by the voices of the angels. A sound so incredibly and indescribably beautiful that I woke up in tears.

The Heaven dream is no more remarkable than my abduction dream in terms of its content. The images of both Heaven and the divine lecture hall are commonplace and can be found in sources ranging from narratives of near-death experiences to accounts of

astral projection. (Strieber, I should note, has a sort of divine lecture series in his later work.) Even the theme of being escorted out of Heaven because I was not supposed to be there is quite common. What I find interesting about the dream is the fact that the entire episode was a screen memory that provided an easily understood façade for a less accessible subtext.

I can explain away both dreams point-by-point if I want to be entirely skeptical, but I am wary of doing so precisely because they reflect, for me, how quickly my own mind was influenced by the convergence of angels and aliens in the collective (un)consciousness.

When I go back and compare the two dreams, what I find is that they are far more similar than they first appear to be. The first dream is about being involuntarily taken to a place where I am supposed to acquire knowledge, but then escaping because I do not want to be part of the reptilians' project. The second dream is what Structuralists might call a parallel inversion of the first: It is about voluntarily (though accidentally) going to a place where I am not supposed to be ... a place where others are acquiring knowledge ... and then being expelled because I am not ready for the angels' project. In each case, the aliens and angels are the authority figures, but they are also working under some other, greater plan.

When I regard the dreams critically, it makes little difference whether or not the events in them were true, just as the factuality of *Communion* is the least interesting question. What matters, more importantly, is the issue of meaning. What the dreams accomplished was to spell out for me, dramatically, my emotional and intellectual feelings about the issues that had been preoccupying my attention. Afterward I had a clearer knowledge ... a visceral knowledge—of my own attitudes toward religion and science, attitudes so full of ambivalence and contradiction that they would have been impossible to express coherently.

These days, thanks to works like *Communion* and their New Age spiritual counterparts, it's hard to make your way through a shopping mall without running into some prominent display of angels and aliens. The images of angels—ranging from calendars full of pre-Raphaelite paintings to photos of human infants doctored up with false wings to represent cherubim—are marketed side-by-side with the latest "gray" face from *The X-Files* and nostalgic posters of *ET: The Extraterrestrial*. On television, some of the most popular shows, both fiction and purportedly factual, are devoted to these phenomena: *Touched By an Angel*, *The X-Files*, *Sightings*, *Unsolved Mysteries*. Even the fluff of *Charlie's Angels* is a generation past, and our time is one for the more socially conscious and responsible "Oprah's Angels."

Although there exists an entire culture whose goal is to demonize both phenomena

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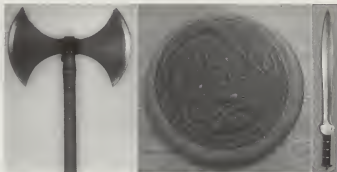
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from a fundamentalist religious perspective, the trend these days is to synthesize aliens and angels. Dozens of books have been published in the past 15 years that address this synthesis, and they are required reading for those who want to understand the profound implications of this cultural convergence. In *Divine Encounters: A Guide to Visions, Angels and Other Emissaries*, Zecharia Sitchin (my favorite crypto-Antiquarian) traces the connection between angels and aliens through biblical literature and back to its sources in ancient Sumerian texts. Sitchin is probably the most credible of the independent scholars who make a case for reading religious texts literally to get at their original meanings. In *A Handbook of Angels*, H.C. Moolenburgh takes a comparative look at higher realms and the creatures associated with them in various traditions around the world. In *Angels and Aliens: UFOs and the Mythic Imagination*, Keith Thompson gives a comprehensive overview of the UFO phenomenon and where it is headed in the cultural consciousness. In *The God Hypothesis: Extraterrestrial Life and Its Implications for Science and Religion*, Joe Lewels addresses this difficult issue head on, and makes a fascinating case for how the phenomenon may be part of the human evolutionary process.

My own impulse is to go back and begin by reflecting on the angel and alien narratives I know through literature and folklore. Technically, angels are angels in that they are intermediaries; likewise, angels are aliens in that they are nonhumans who come from another world, thought to be "above" this one. The term "angel," which we generally take to mean "messenger," is our inheritance of a Greek translation of the Hebrew word *mal'akh*, whose original meaning referred to the shadow side of God.

Every culture has well-known stories about encounters with divine or otherworldly beings. I grew up hearing the story of "The Heavenly Maiden and the Woodcutter," which is a Korean variant on the Celtic Selkie story. The story of Thomas the Rhymer has all the classic earmarks of an abduction narrative, including the theme of having sex with the alien. Ellen Kushner's novel of the same title dramatizes the transformation of Thomas into a man who can only tell the truth; he becomes very similar to the returned abductee whose altered consciousness inadvertently changes the lives of those around him. In American literature, we have Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle," which has uncanny similarities with Strieker's body of works if you consider that it is presented as a true account found among the papers of one Diedrich Knickerbocker. "Rip Van Winkle"



Thanks to literature devoted to the supernatural, aliens can be seen in everyday culture in movies like *Enemy Mine*.

also comes with a simultaneous disclaimer and authentication at its conclusion, and it draws on German folklore and then combines it with local Native American trickster tales. In biblical lore, the alien/angel theme is hardly disguised.

There are plenty of abductions and UFOs, including Ezekiel's wheel-within-a-wheel (which motivated Joseph Blumrich, a NASA engineer, to write *The Spaceships of Ezekiel*); there are flaming chariots and Jacob's ascent up the ladder into a UFO (in addition to his angel-wrestling). There are angelic messengers who save those about to be destroyed in divine catastrophes (including Lot and his family, who are rescued from Sodom). There are those who have seriously argued that the Star of Bethlehem was a UFO, and even Satan's temptation of Christ in the wilderness has the earmarks of an abduction (remember, Satan is Lucifer, a former archangel, who becomes the cursed reptilian). In pre-biblical literature, there are plenty of abductions and UFOs, as well as divine creatures, in the Vedic classics like *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*. In Sumerian literature, the oldest recorded human literature, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, even includes descriptions that could only be eyewitness accounts of Earth seen from varying distances in space.

One need only look at familiar things with a slight shift in perspective. The current synthesis of aliens and angels into what I call "aliengels" is causing exactly that sort of shift, and it has profound implications for culture, whether one's world-view is scientific or religious. After all, the angels are the unstoppable folk reality that confounds those who try to control organized religions; likewise, the alien is the folkloric figure that confounds science (which, some argue, is a religion of its own). ■

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EMMY CLOSED THE DOOR TO HER ROOM FIRMLY BEHIND HER AND WHISTLED the *Twilight Zone* theme—their signal. The closet door swung open as she dumped her backpack and sat on the floor.

Action Annie skated out, her in-line skates rumbling softly along the floor. She combed nylon hair out of painted eyes with the thumbs of her spoon hands, and reported: "Quiet for now, but it's been a lousy day." Her voice shook, out of sync with her perpetually perky smile. "Bikey Mikey's broken."

Emmy glanced at the corner where BeeBee Baby's empty bassinet stood ready with its assortment of glues, pliers, needles, thread, and illegal X-acto knives. "So why isn't he in sickbay?"

Annie shook her head—carefully, for she had been repaired so many times the nub on her shoulders was worn and the hole at her neck stretched. "There's nothing you can do. He's—he's melted."

"Melted!" Emmy clenched her fists and said a bad word she'd learned on cable TV. She didn't know what it meant, but it had to be a bad word, or Mom wouldn't have turned red and told her to never, ever use it. "What happened?"

THE

BY PENI R. GRIFFIN

ILLUSTRATION BY WEB BRYANT

Didn't you sometimes wish your toys and dolls would come to life and tell you their secrets?

Emmy probably wished for that, too.

TROOPS

"He was riding the pentacle," said Annie. "The Tinies were up among the dresses, trying to find—" she hesitated. "That smell Roy complained about this morning."

The implications of that smell hadn't been lost on Emmy, either; but she'd been late for school. "It means the critter's trying to get through the back of this closet into Roy's," she said. "You should've waited for orders."

"We were afraid," said Annie. "Roy only has a bunch of micro-brained dinosaurs and fancy block sets. The blocks can't come alive and the dinos wouldn't be able to think fast enough to respond to the threat. If the critter breaks out that way, it's all she wrote. I didn't think we had time to wait for orders. The Tinies proposed the plan, and I OK'd it. I wish now I hadn't."

No point riding her. "All right. Go on."

"The Tinies climbed up the shoe rack and into the skirts to make their way to the back of the closet to get a look at the rear wall. They were supposed to go and report back. No fancy stuff. But Tot spotted fading right off the edge of the sleeve of your winter coat. She was sure that she could contain it in a pentacle in just a few minutes."

"And she fell. Dagnab it! I've told y'all to be careful!"

"They were. They were joined by string, and she looped it around a button before she crawled out the sleeve. They were hauling her back up when—it saw her and—I don't know how it could do this. None of us had seen this attack before. It was like a laser. A black laser came out of the center and cut right through her string."

"But it's not Tot who's melted."

"No. Bikey Mikey saw her fall, pedaled straight for where she'd land, caught her, and hurled her toward the door. She landed clean. But Mikey—"

"He broke the pentacle?"

"Cowboy Kate lassoed him out and Horsey Heather raced to repair the break. But Mikey was done for. And the lasso. And we had to patch the pentacle larger." Annie twisted her head all the way around in frustration. "It all happened in less than a minute. And the fading on the rear wall's as bad as ever. Tot wasn't halfway done with her pentacle when she fell. I'm sorry. I'm so—" her voice choked out.

"It's not your fault," said Emmy. She took a deep breath. "It's mine." "You weren't even here."

"We wouldn't have a problem if it weren't for me. And I've known since yesterday what to do about it." Emmy spread her hands helplessly. "I was afraid to do it."

"You know how to contain it? Permanently?" Annie prouetted on her skates and whirled her arms. "What do we need to do?"

"I need to do it," said Emmy. "Wake up the second shift and I'll tell everyone at the—at the funeral. Where's Mikey?"

Annie pointed. As she rolled toward the bed and dove underneath, Emmy lifted the lid of the shoebox beside the closet. Mikey was already wrapped in funeral white Kleenex, but not taped. Gently Emmy rolled him out, hoping that Annie's assessment of his condition was wrong, that drastic measures would restore him, at least partially.

His clothes, being all nylon, had melted into his vinyl skin. The nylon lasso with which Kate had retrieved him had burned to his plastic torso, and his flexible vinyl legs were twisted horribly. His head was a mass of charred and bubbled paint. Only his hands, still clenched on empty air ready for the insertion of handlebars, were whole. The hands that had thrown Tot to safety. Emmy bit down a sob and squeezed her eyes shut till the tears backed up. So brave—they were all so brave.

Behind her, she heard the second shift emerging from under the bed and forming into ranks. She wasn't ready to explain. She wasn't ready to do this. But it must be done.

She opened the closet door wider. The pentacle glowed in a negative image on the floor. From this angle, the critter was invisible behind the light. Kate and Heather, astride their faithful horses Paint and Midnight, trotted steadily along its outline, Kate trotting the circle, and Heather cantering the straight lines of the star. Kate saw

Emmy and waved, but Heather crouched over Midnight's neck, staring straight ahead, grimly riding a pattern that had taken two riders even before it so nearly filled all the space between the door and the back wall.

Another inch, and that would be it, thought Emmy. My little brother will be the first to go.

Duh. Whose fault is that?

Everyone else on the first shift—the seven Tinies, Baby Bottles, and Purrry Kitty—were at alert stations or working on Mikey's bike. It hadn't come away unscathed, but thick rubber bands already replaced the melted tires, and the twisted frame was almost straight again. Tot passed her magic wand to Toodle and ran up to Emmy. "I'm sorry!" she wailed. "I never should have—he should've left me there—I should—"

Emmy cradled her in her palm. "Hush. You did your best and he did his best and that's all anybody can do."

Baby Bottles crawled over, dragging the bike. "It's almost good again," she said. "I'm afraid if we twist it one more time, it'll snap."

"We'll try it like this," said Emmy. "Have you figured out who can ride it?"

Bottles and Purrry looked at each other. "We'll have tryouts," said Purrry. "The Tinies think two of them can handle it as a team effort. One to steer and one to pedal."

"I know our legs are too short to reach the pedals," said Tot, before Emmy could, "but I have this idea about rowing, with a lever and a rubber band, and—we've got to try. The horses are worn out."

"It'll be all right," said Emmy. "After tonight, no one will have to ride the pentacle."

"Tonight? But—"

"Second shift assembled," called Annie, from the room.

"Listen through the door," said Emmy. "I'm about to give the briefing."

She set Tot down and backed out of the closet. The second shift saluted, according to the varied limitations of their stuffed, vinyl, and hard plastic bodies. Jungle Jim, second-shift's bike rider due to his limber legs and grasping hands, stood especially straight and still. The second-shift horsewomen, Jockey Jill and Circus Cindy, flanked him on restive horses. For Flash, the racer, to dance in place was nothing odd; but Emmy had never seen Toby, the big circus horse, fidget before. Everyone, she saw, was on edge; everyone strung up by Mikey's death. The bear family huddled together. Floppy Puppy's ears trembled, and he and BeeBee Baby huddled together at the end of the second row. The ballerinas, usually endlessly, unthinkingly running through the five positions even at attention, stood stock still. And Princess Peggy—unflappable, immaculate Princess Peggy, who always looked regal even now that the critter had burned off all her glorious hair—had laid aside her glittering gown for a black pantsuit. To a stranger, her face and Action Annie's would have been as bland and smiling as ever. Emmy could see the strain in their painted eyes, the fatigue in their plastic shoulders, the stress at key points of their durable anatomies. They hadn't been designed for this kind of service.

Emmy picked up the box containing Bikey Mikey's remains and knelt where she could be seen and heard clearly from both the closet and the ranks. "I don't have to tell you," she said, "how bravely Mikey died, or how much we'll miss him. Tot said to me just now that he should have left her there, but we all know he couldn't do that." A murmur of agreement went through the ranks. "There isn't any one of you who wouldn't have made the same effort and taken the same risk for any of the others. That's the way you've always been. None of you ever sits around figuring out why one of you is more important than any of the others, or deserves more, or should get by with doing less. I never hear any of you say you can't or you don't want to. With you, it's always the best you can do. Day after day. Night after night. Mikey isn't a hero because he died, but because he tried, right up to the last minute—and you're all heroes." Emmy took a deep breath. "If I were as brave as any one of you, Mikey'd be alive this minute."

Another murmur—of doubt this time, but Emmy had been thinking about this all day and knew what she said was true. What she didn't know was whether, if Mikey hadn't died, she would be facing up to it now.

"But no more of you will die. I promise you, and I can promise now because I know what I have to do. I've known since yesterday morning and I was too scared to do it, but now—" she touched the Kleenex-wrapped corpse gently, without looking at it—"now I know it doesn't matter how scared I am."

"What are you going to do?" asked Annie. "And how do you know it'll work?"

"Because it worked last time," answered Emmy, hoping she sounded brave and confident and worthy of all these small desperately smiling faces. "When they put up the subdivision they left a lot of trees. The biggest one is between here and the corner where we catch the school bus. It spoke to me."

"A tree did?" said Peggy, skeptically. Peggy was always the last to believe anything. It was her job. "How did it talk?"

"Through a knot in the wood," said Emmy. "It freaked me out worse than the first time Annie spoke to me, if you can believe that." A nervous laugh went through the troops. They all remembered how Emmy had been staring disbelievingly at the tiny, but lurid, vortex opening in the middle of her closet floor, and when Annie spoke she'd nearly gone through the ceiling. The tree had been much, much worse than seeing her toys come to life. The toys at least had recognizable faces, features she could connect with human speech and feelings. Grandmother Oak had been—had been—she didn't want to think about it.

"How do you know it's honest?" asked Annie. "It might be on the critter's side."

"I don't think so," said Emmy. "I don't think this critter's really into nature and all that, do you? Remember, it was trapped till the house was built. It was people—" it was Emmy—"that gave it an opening to get back into the world. Trees and grass and flowers aren't its style."

"So what did this tree say?" asked BeeBee Baby.

"I've been trying to tell you. Remember Roy had a dentist's appointment and didn't go to school yesterday morning, so I was by myself. Otherwise she couldn't have talked to me at all, no more than y'all can." Not that they hadn't tried. Life would have been so much simpler if she could have called Mom and Dad to the rescue, but all their attempts had ended in humiliation. Another thing not to think about. "She's been awake since the vortex opened—more awake than trees normally are, I mean. She told me the whole story. See, a long time ago—"

"Rap, rap," at the door. "Dinner in 15," called Mom.

"What?" Emmy jerked her head around in dismay. "It's too early!"

"Dad and I have that party, remember? We want you and Roy to finish eating before the sitter gets here."

"OK. OK, in a minute." Emmy rocked back and forth, waiting till she heard her mother walk away. "So much for telling you the whole story. The important thing is, I have to go into the vortex."

"A frontal attack!" Annie pirouetted. "All right! I'm there!"

"No, you're not," said Emmy. "I go into the vortex, and you close up the floor for me."

"Close it up? With what? Glue?" Peggy sounded even more skeptical than usual.

Emmy reached into her backpack and pulled out the ingredients—the jar lid, the matches, the clove and garlic and basil, plus the more obscure plants she had gathered at the tree's instruction—and the poem. "You toss half this stuff into the vortex after me, burn the rest in the pentacle, and read this."

"Read?" said Action Annie. "None of us reads very well, you know."

"I know. Practice while I'm at supper. I'll be back as soon as I can, and we'll do this."

"OK. What else?"

"That's all. I go into the vortex. You close up the floor after me. Those two things stop the vortex and my staying there keeps him

from starting it up again."

"Your—staying there?" BeeBee Baby's voice sounded smaller than usual.

"That's not what she means," said Annie. "Is it? You don't—stay there? Forever?"

Emmy swallowed and nodded. "Yes, I do. Until this house is torn down and somebody else activates the spot again, like I did when I—" they didn't know this part—"when I wished something would come carry Roy away."

There, it was out, but that didn't seem to be what was rattling them. "So you never come out?" said Annie. "But what about—what will your folks—"

"They'll think I've been kidnapped," said Emmy. "I hope they don't blame the sitter. But what can I do? It's my fault this thing's opened up. If I don't go into the vortex, it'll come out and carry Roy away—and a lot of other people, too."

"Do we really know that the critter'll be that bad if it gets out?" asked Peggy. "Maybe it just wants to be free and that's why it's so nasty now."

Emmy shook her head. "The tree told me all about it. A shaman called it up to drive out the white men, but the first thing it did was swallow him. Then it started prairie fires and swallowing up everyone—red, black, or white—it could get near. The shaman's sister had to organize the tribe to force it back into the vortex, and then she went in after it. But it took them several tries and they lost a lot of Indians before they found the right way to close up the ground. Random magic spilled all over the place. It was a mess. I can't let it get out again, so I have to go into the vortex. It's not any harder than what Mikey did." Emmy stood up. "Y'all practice reading the poem and lighting the matches. Be careful with the matches! I don't want anybody melted or scorched. Peggy and Annie can work out the best combination of people to hold the closet while the others are practicing. I know you first-shift people are tired, but this is it. The last night. We'll never have to do this again. Keep it in mind, and we'll get through." She saluted both halves, the ranks and the closet. "You make me so proud. It's time I lived up to you."

IT WAS LATER THAN SHE'D PLANNED, DARK OUTSIDE the windows and in the hall, when Emmy returned to her room. The stupid babysitter didn't know how to handle Roy. And maybe she hadn't been in the hurry she should have been. At last she had forced herself to mention homework and retreat. Roy, maybe sensing something wrong, had tried to prevent her going. "You're always doing homework," he said. "You can play some."

Was she a terrible person for almost saying yes?

It didn't matter. She was here now, and the bad-egg smell of the vortex came out to meet her even through the closed door. Her heart almost stopped. The critter must have heard it all and made one last mad rush for freedom! Emmy almost jerked the door open, remembered in time, opened it just wide enough to squeeze herself through, and shut it behind her.

Annie stood alone in the closet doorway, silhouetted against the swirling orange light. "There you are!" she said. "Thank goodness!"

"What the—" Emmy stepped forward, knelt down, and saw.

The vortex swirled behind the grid of the pentacle, taking up the entire closet floor and some of the back wall. Even her shoe rack was gone. She could see right down into it, the entire critter, whom she had only glimpsed in bits and pieces before. She could only see him in bits and pieces now, struggling against the embrace of the troops.

The horses pranced on his broad head as their riders swarmed over his arms, or they might be tentacles, and the ballerinas agilely dodged his efforts to shake or scrape or twist them off his hands, or whatever they were. Purrry Kitty and Floppy Puppy circled his neck, clinging to him with their paws and to each other with mouths and tails. Jungle Jim scrambled across his face, dodging improbably

Continued on page 72

In the days after the Civil War, a
man did what he could
to keep body and soul together.



photographer's wagon sets to the edge a this field. His horse nuzzles the dry ground while the photographer—a white man—roots in the back, pullin out stuff like a man settin up camp. I stand in fronta my full litter and watch—anythin for a break. Behind me, Dawson says sumpin loud enough for me ta hear, but too low for me ta catch the words. I don't miss the meanin. He thinks I don't work hard enough.

Maybe not. I ain't supposed to be here. Battlegrounds is dangerous for a man like me, even battlegrounds 10 months old. But I need the money and the U.S. Government is payin more than I'd make anywhere else. Luce is pregnant, and times is so different now. Different than they was a month ago. If we kin get out a Virginia, we kin live a real life. A real life—that's worth touchin the souls a the dead.

The white man, he gets out a the wagon, draggin a long, three-legged black stand. He ain't that tall, kinda skinny, with a big black beard and stringy hair. His coat's too warm for the day, even though the air's got a bite. He'll be bakin before the afternoon's out. April in Virginia's a bad mix a hot and cold; mornins like ta freeze your hands and afternoons sometimes make you sweat. I ain't got many clothes but I wear my oldest pants, a heavy shirt I kin pull off if I gotta, and a stockin cap that folds over my brow. Last night, I searched our place for gloves, but we ain't got none, or at least none Luce'll let me dirty so I got ta do this work with my bare hands. So far I ain't touched nothin but cloth. Cloth was bad enough.

As I think on that, I wipe my palms on the thick cotton a my pants. Corpses 10 months dead ain't quite skeletons yet. They got bits a skin hangin off the bones, and some lumpish stuff in the skull. The clothes is still on em, hangin rag-like now, with the stench a death still clingin. Mosta these white boys been layin in the Virginia sun since last June. A few been claimed by family—mostly Rebs who lived nearby—but the rest, their families been told they was lost or died “valiantly” or was buried by comrades.

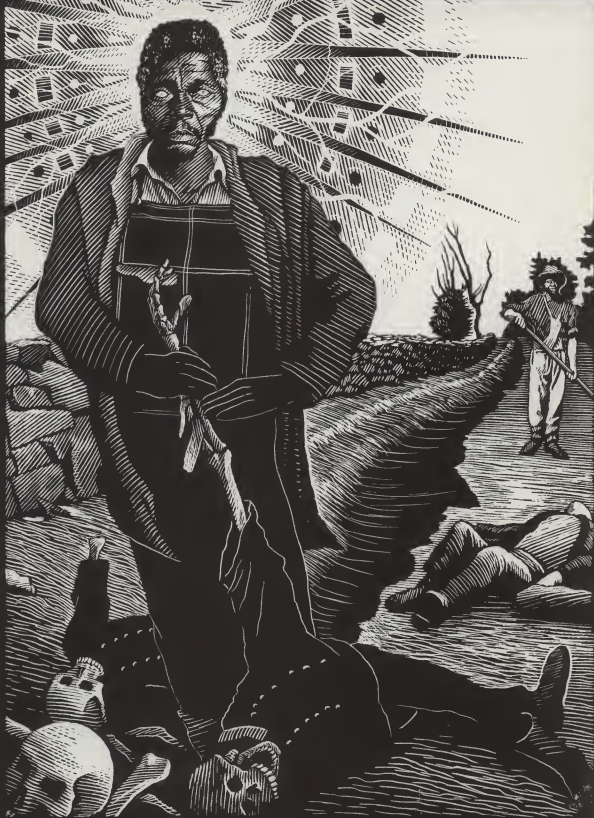
Guess I count as a comrade, near ta a year after the fact.

The white man, he got the box part on top a the stand and he's carryin a crate a plates like they weighed as much as him. He eases em down, grabs one, and the glass catches

burial DETAIL

By Kristine Kathryn Rusch

Illustration by Patrick Arrasmith



the Sun. He grins at me like he spects me ta grin back. I look away. I dunno what interests a white man in a group a folk tillin this field a death. There's five a us on this patch—five live ones, that is—and maybe a two hundred dead. And those's the ones we kin count. It don't take into consideration the ones the animals got, leavin bones scattered all over every which way. Or the ones that blowed up when they's hit by cannon, or those that was burned when the Rebs tried ta light the breastworks, tryin ta start a fire that consumed all like they done in the Wilderness. Ain't too many burned here. One a the boys who's diggin, he worked burial in the Wilderness, and he say the smell a smoke's still fresh in the air.

I couldn't work there no more than I kin work here. I'm new ta this crew, so they give me the worst job. I shoulda been diggin. The land talks but it don't say as much as bodies.

I picks up the litter and drags it ta the hole Dawson's dug. A leg bone rolls off, gets buried under some dried grass. I stare for a minute. I don't wanna touch it again, but I guess I will after I deliver the litter ta Dawson.

He's leanin on his shovel, starin at the molderin pile a blue cloth that I piled on the bottom a the litter. It's harder ta look at the skulls, with their empty eyes and sad little grins. The skulls, they show you youse pickin up bits a men. The cloth could be nothin more than garbage left by the retreatin army.

Dawson reaches down ta help me with the litter when I get close ta the hole. This one's deep, the dirt darker below than it is up top. He's been diggin a while, but he don't got blisters like I'd get if I spent the mornin makin that hole. His hands got calluses on 'em—he used ta work the land.

I worked the house until the war done started. I was younger then, wasn't quite ready ta be the butler or the reg'lar manservant, but I was trainin. The Missus, she say I had ta learn ta talk better, and I was doin that when they fought the first battle at Manassas, north a here.

The Missus, she pack up everythin, put it in storage—not that it helped when they burned the city—and she and the little ones went ta live with relatives west a here. Master died at Gettysburg—the real butler told me that when I saw him las week. I was gonna go north, but Luce stopped me. She was pregnant then too, but lost the baby when it was too late for us ta leave. Not enough food, I guess. Her body couldn't handle a baby and survivin at the same time.

I tended her, doin odd jobs, sayin I was free, even though the Missus made it clear she spected all a us ta be around when she got back. Gave us a roof at least till it was burned from over us.

Now we's really and truly free, have been for near two weeks, ever since Grant and Lee signed some papers in Appomattox, not too far from here. They's Union soldiers everywhere—to keep the peace, they say, tho havin soldiers didn't help ole Mister Lincoln none. Luce been cryin bout him for more'n a week, like he was someone she knew personal.

Thins's changed, and under the good's sumpin bad comin. I kin feel it. It's the way them Rebs look at us when we's walkin down the street, not carryin nothin a theirs, not sayin "yessir" and "nosir," at least when we's thinkin a it. Some habits get ground in good. I still bob my head like a good darkie most a the time, and I hates it more

with each bob, like it takes a little piece a me, grinds it up, and loses it forever.

The North's still the Promised Land, least ta me and Luce. We's gonna raise our kids where there's no battlefields, no burned-out buildings, and no hatred in white folks' eyes.

So I's workin here.

And now a white man thinks I'm worth photographin.

He's a strange critter, that white man. He been crouchin behind the black curtain, pointin the box ever which way tryin ta see what direction's best. We been pretendin he's not there, waitin for the white boss hired us ta come back and make him go way. Least I been. Finally, I says that ta Dawson as we tilt the litter.

He laughs. "Ain't no one but us til sundown. No white boy's gonna get his hands in this, Yank or not."

The bodies tumble off the edge, revealin sun-yellow bones mixed in with the cloth. The boots and brass buttons, medals and watches is mostly gone. Guess someone could come and steal from the dead but didn't have the stomach ta bury 'em. Maybe a white man woulda done this job if there'd been real pickins ta get from it.

A small cloud a dust rises from below and a faint stink a rot. One a the skulls tumbles ta the edge, lands upside down. Looks disrespectful ta me, but I ain't crawlin in there ta right no white boy's head. I done enough a that with ones that was alive.

"I guess I better dig a new hole," Dawson says.

I look around us. They's bodies everywhere. "It'll take most the day ta fill this one."

I don't wanna do bodies by myself. Sooner or later I gotta touch one, really touch one, and then it'll go bad for all a us.

Dawson looks at me long. His eyes are pale green, got from some white man who thought his slave women was good enough for more than scrubbin or pickin. Finally, I's the one who looks away. He ain't touchin no more bodies. He moved up ta diggin when I got hired. He ain't comin back ta this job.

So I's pick up my litter and move ta the next patch a ground. They's a trench jus ahead a me. That's the Reb line. They dug in, didn't let Grant get into Richmond, not then anyway.

Name a this battle here was Cold Harbor. They ain't no harbor nowhere near round, just little streams, swamps, and high ridges. Lots a windy roads. Ain't no accurate maps, that's why they say Grant lost. Didn't know the land, didn't know how ta fight here.

All I member was the way hope turned sour in my stomach when I found out the Yanks done gone around Richmond, went ta Petersburg and tried ta work their way up. I member thinkin, *hopin*, they was gonna bust through and free us all. Wasn't that long ago they finally got ta Richmond, and then wasn't the way I thought it'd be tall.

They's a lot a bodies here, most a em recognizab. All tangled where they fell, legs under em, arms splayed out, skinless hands clawin toward the sky. I sit the litter next ta the biggest pile and wipe the sweat off my face. The mornin's still cold, but what's facin me's got me hot.

I look for that white man. He's still messin with his camera, yellin sumpin at Kershaw and the rest a the crew. Wants em ta pose. I ain't

A real life—that THE SOULS

gonna pose. Not with no litter a bodies and open graves all around. Who wants ta look at that six months from now? Who wants ta think about this ever again?

The canvas stretched across the litter is stained with old blood from its days in the field hospital and goo from the bodies. This time, they ain't none that's just dissolved ta cloth, like my first site. I used that cloth ta hold skulls so the bleached bone didn't touch my fingers. Then I sit it on the litter and let it fall into the hole, just like the rest a the stuff.

I wish I ain't done that.

I bend over the first body. Uniform is patched and ripped, thin on the elbows and knees. Don't know how they wore that stuff in the Virginia heat. Last May-June it was hotter than holy hell, a sticky deadly heat that was killin old folks in Richmond. Don't know how men marched in it. Don't know how they fought, how they used rifles, barrels turnin hot against they hands, fires burnin all around. Don't know how they come even this far.

My throat gets tight and I makes myself swallow. Then I crouch and slide my hands under that heavy coat. The bones shift and the back a the wool is wet with sumpin I don't want ta think about. I lift and put the body on the litter. Fortunately, all the pieces stay together.

I do the same with the next one, but my luck has run out. The right arm, crossed over the chest as if he was tryin ta cover his heart, slides off, and I catch it, fingers slippin through a hole in the sleeve, catchin bone.

It's soft and smooth and—

he's hungry, so hungry his stomach's cramping. Dust is thick around him, and all he can hear—all he's heard for days—is cannon and musketry rattling like a storm that doesn't quit. Sweat's in his eyes—at least he thinks that's sweat. Orders are to take the line, go over the breastworks, find the weapons, get another five miles before nightfall.

Five miles and they can't even take one.

He doesn't even know where his friends are. Two fell on the march here, in Sun so hot it seemed to broil human flesh. The sandy plain was heated to the intensity of a blast furnace. If he survives this, he'll tell his son that he's been to hell and no man should live in such a way that he has to spend eternity there. His son. Wide blue eyes and pudgy fingers. He'll be a boy when the war's over, not a baby. A boy—

... looked like some kind of fit," the white man's sayin. He's left his camera and is bent over me. He's younger'n me, his hair stickin up like he ain't never seen the butt enda a comb. He smells a sweat and chemicals.

"Weren't no fit." Dawson's got me braced. He's moved me away from the bodies. I kin see his chin from here, stubble already growin, the stubborn set a his jaw. Worked with him only a mornin and I kin already read him.

"You should give him some water, or feed him," the white man says. "I saw things like this during the war. Strong men—"

"He don't need water," Dawson says.

I set up, wipe my hand in the grass. I kin still feel that bone on my skin, still feel that boy's life like it was my own. He weren't more than 20, a wife and son back home. New baby he seen only once—a Christmas leave he was lucky enough ta get. The wife cried when he left.

What if it's the last time I see you? she said, clingin, makin his dress shirt wet with her tears.

Now, April, he said, you just gotta believe we're gonna spend the rest of our lives together.

But I kin feel inside the fear eatin at him, the lies he told durin the whole stay so she wouldn't worry unduly, the way he tried ta memorize his baby's face so it'd be the last thin he'd see.

And it was.

I puts my head in my hands, but they smell a rot, and I can't stomach it. The white man, he's still worryin but Dawson, he's got his arms crossed.

"How come you ain't told me you got the Sight?" he ask.

"Ain't none yo bidness."

The white man, he frownin like we ain't speakin English.

"It my bidness when you can't do yo job," Dawson say.

"I kin."

"You faint then ever time you touch sumpin?"

"I done the whole mornin. I just need some cloth or gloves or sumpin. That's all."

He grunts, sighs, looks ta the rest a the crew. They's thousands a dead round here, days, maybe weeks a work, and he ain't got a lot a men. We all need the money. He know that. He prob'ly know why too. He prob'ly got the same dream.

"I have gloves," the white man says.

"He don't need fancy gloves," Dawson says.

"I kin use cloth." I don't want no debt ta no white man.

"My gloves'll work better," he says. "They're not fancy. I used them for carryin. I have another pair."

I need the job more'n I need my pride. But I don't say nothin. The white man, he take that for a yes, and runs ta his wagon.

"Who he?" I ask.

Dawson shrugs. "You got the Sight bad."

"It come down through the family."

He nod. "It ain't forward Sight?"

I shake my head. "Only what was."

His smile's sad. "I knows what was. I was hopin you could see what would be."

"I'm hopin that too."

He get up, his knees crackin. "I ain't givin up the shovel."

"I know," I say. It's work with the bodies or go home. I jus got ta be more careful.

He go back ta his new hole. I look at the bodies stretched out around me, skulls turned toward the mornin Sun. All a em got stories. All a em got wives and families and little boys with liquid blue eyes who ain't never goin ta hear the story a this place.

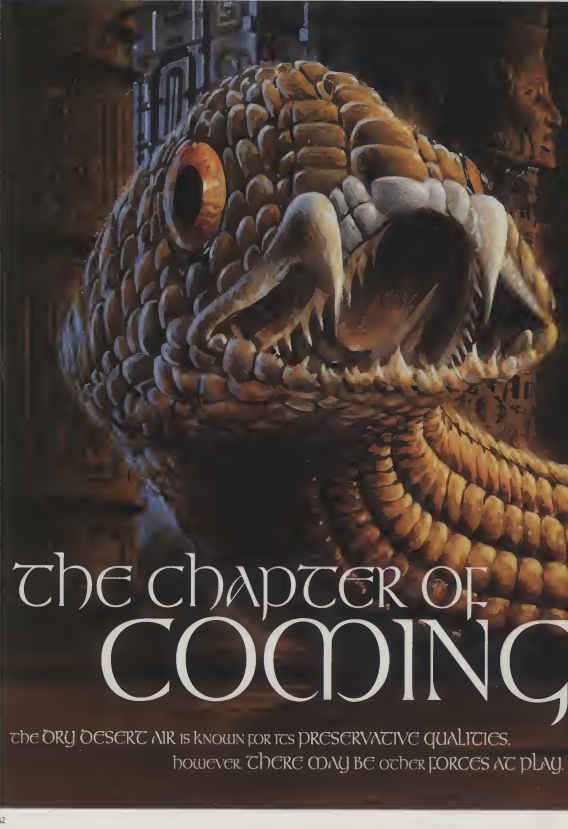
Coz these boys fought n died, me and Luce and the baby still inside her, we got a chance. Coz these boys fought n died, I's gettin paid this day dead a doin this work for some Massa who says he own me. Coz these boys fought n died, my child kin grow up in my house with my wife in my family.

Coz these boys fought n died.

The white man, he run back ta me and crouch like I'm sick and he gotta be real careful. He got thick gloves, leather, better than any I ever had. He hand em ta me.

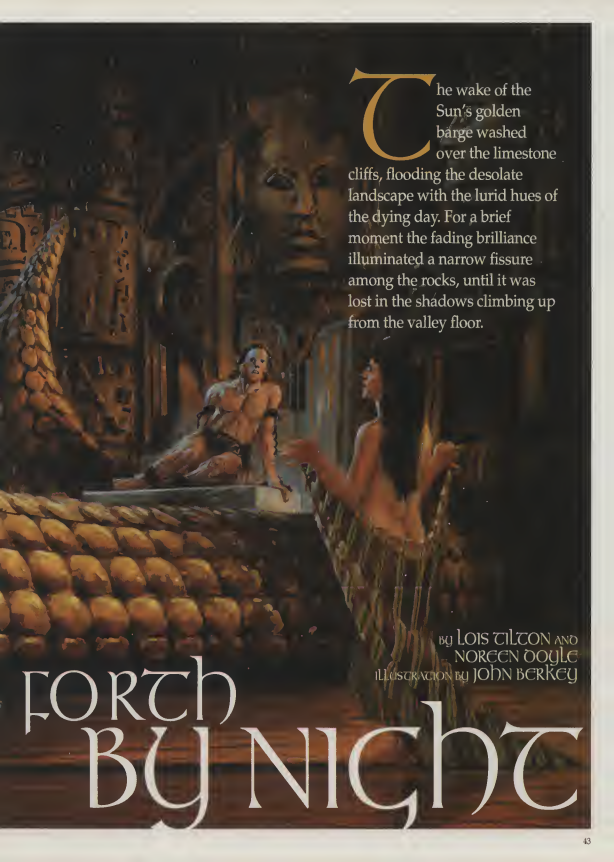
Continued on page 80

s worth touchin A THE DEAD



the chapter of COMING

the DRY DESERT AIR IS KNOWN FOR ITS PRESERVATIVE QUALITIES.
however, THERE MAY BE OTHER FORCES AT play.



The wake of the Sun's golden barge washed over the limestone cliffs, flooding the desolate landscape with the lurid hues of the dying day. For a brief moment the fading brilliance illuminated a narrow fissure among the rocks, until it was lost in the shadows climbing up from the valley floor.

BY LOIS TILTON AND
NOREEN DOYLE
ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN BERKEY

FORTH BY NIGHT

The cooling desert exhaled; the lizards and scorpions crept from the crevasses and shallow dens where they had taken refuge from the searing heat of the day. Sand slid away, widening the fissure, from which stepped into the newborn night a figure draped in a hooded black cloak, as if shadows had wrapped themselves around her. The Oppressor had departed the sky and she was free, until his return.

Raising her arms, she faced the west and her voice filled the evening silence:

*A hymn of damnation to thee at eventide,
When thou shalt set as the living set,
Forever and forever in the West,
Never to traverse thy nightly passage,
For the Fiend shall swallow thy proa,
For the Fiend shall swallow thy midships,
For the Fiend shall swallow thy stern,
And the Fiend shall swallow thee and thy every crew.*

Here of all places on Earth was the oppressive power of the Sun most manifest, this barren land burned lifeless, a place where only the dead dwelled, they and their forgotten gods. She knew them all, the ancient dead: From the gnawed and scattered bones of beggars to the flesh of kings preserved in aromatic resins and cased in solid gold. Yet it was life she needed now, so she descended with a smooth gliding stride across the crumbling rocks and sand, toward those places where water flowed.

Approaching the familiar scent of goats and donkeys—a well, and men drawn to it with their livestock to spend the night. One of them slept a bit apart from the fire where the rest were gathered, wrapped in his ragged blanket against the evils of darkness. She beckoned him in dreams. He opened his eyes, he beheld her: The black cloak thrown back from her shoulders uncovered the alabaster smoothness of her form, glowing like the Moon against the cloak that hid only her face from his sight.

Like a serpent his staff of life rose, though he never willed it, for he knew what she was, and his fear would have made him flee if only he could have moved. But he was entirely powerless to resist her, and soon his drained and lifeless form lay empty on the ground.

Five thousand years ago the people of this region had found the remains of such men, her victims, preserved undecayed in the sun-baked sand. So they in error came to believe in the power of the Oppressor to grant eternal life, and they began to prepare the bodies of their dead to keep them from corruption in their tombs. But those times had long since passed and the monuments they had once raised were ruins now, their treasures plundered and despoiled by grave robbers.

This man too had been a grave robber, drawn to this barren land by greed, which overruled his fear of the spectres that were whispered to haunt the buried necropolis. Now his own grave would be

she had commanded men to steal for her, to bring her riches from the graves at Thebes and Memphis, and with these lures of gold and alabaster and lapis lazuli she tempted others into these hills. Sometimes she had caught her own. "Forgive me, Nakht," she whispered.

She poured the objects back into the sack and drew the strings tight. On her return, she would replace them among the rocks. More men would come to seek such things, as they had for ages. And they would find them. And her.

Sunrise came too soon. Fearful of the Oppressor's harsh touch, which would shivel her as surely as it had the desert, as surely as she had shriveled this man at her feet, she returned to her Lord's house of eternity.

Within the heart of the hills was the tomb where her Lord was imprisoned. He lay at the very back of it, fastened to the rock floor by adamantine chains forged by the Creator from the substance of Creation. But more hateful yet was the immense Serpent coiled next to his body, formed from the living stone.

"Brother, I return."

He turned a face that pain could never make less beautiful to her. "You were not gone so long tonight."

Millennia had passed while he lay bound here, great empires rose and fell, and the gods themselves had passed away, fading even from the memory of the people who now lived in this most ancient of lands. But there was yet a sharp pang to see the plunder of the temples and shrines which men so long ago had built for the worship of her Lord and their brothers and sisters. She hated the thieves but she needed them, for without their lives she could not spare her Lord the most painful of his torments.

"More rich foreign merchants come into the land. The grave robbers are all dreaming of becoming wealthy men." So she had heard their thoughts as she slid unseen past their sleeping forms.

He sighed, nostrils flaring. "It seems strange to think of the world to have become such a poor place that so many men still travel here from afar to hunt for gold. Has the breed of man become too lazy to dig their own mines? Or do they build their cities of gold and, having run dry the veins within the Earth, seek the gold of ancients?"

"Not just for gold, beloved brother, do they come. It might be common stone shaped by human hand so long as it is five thousand years old they covet it. It is antiquity they seek." Five thousand years. Near two million sunrises had passed since her Lord was first chained here. How could so much be endured?

They spoke of tomb robbers, of such matters of little significance, to keep their minds from the dreadful hour that approached, when the burning golden barge would break through the barriers of night, ferrying the Oppressor onto the throne of his realm—the Usurper who had chained his bother, the rightful Lord of the land, and condemned him to this eternal suffering. Nothing could hold back the

... the people of this region had
men, her victims, preserved un



a shallow pit in the desert. But all mortals must die; only the gods were doomed to live forever.

She drew a leather sack out from his tattered garments, spilled the familiar contents onto the ground. Once these had lain in the tomb of Nakht, her faithful worshiper: Scarabs and other amulets of fine faience; a gold ring; a tiny glass bottle; the stopper of a canopic jar with the head of a baboon carved of alabaster from Hatnub. She reflected that once her own image had watched over the preserved remains of her mortal worshippers. How long it had been since anyone had called upon her power or sung her praises! Now she too was reduced to a thief, little more than a grave robber herself, she who had once been invoked as a protectress of the dead. In ancient days,

hours, not even a god, and the moment came at last when the darkness lifted at the back of the cave, and the stone Serpent moved.

First its eyes shifted, then its head rose, and its tongue flicked the air, searching for the scent of its appointed prey. She watched her Lord, unable to avert her eyes as the vast head turned toward him, as the fanged jaws slowly opened. So she had watched for century after century, helpless to stop it, powerless to help him while the cruel jaws bit and severed his limbs, one by one, devouring them as the Usurper's curse had decreed: *Like the Serpent thou shalt be limbless, by the Serpent thou shalt be dismembered.*

As it had been spoken, thus it was done.

And for all those centuries she had searched through the most

secret archives of the temples, the hidden tombs of priests and magicians, through the scrolls and inscriptions, searching for the spell to save him. And found it at last, though the cost was high—the cost was a life, for every sunrise.

Yet why were mortals born, except to die? And to serve their gods? So this night as on so many others she had gone forth to take life, and now she gave it up, straining to give birth, uttering the words of the spell as it had been written: *O thou shabti! As my Lord is called, as my Lord is adjudged, behold! Let the judgment fall not upon him, but upon thee!*

And into her hands it came, wet from the birth-passage between her legs, the homunculus, a perfect copy of her Lord, who as god of the barren desert could never himself father a child. The Serpent's cruel jaws gaped wide, about to strike, and she forestalled it, offering this small piece of flesh as a sacrifice in the place of her Lord. So it was done, the sacrifice taken, and her Lord spared his suffering until another sunrise came.

Dr. Archibald C. Wordsley turned up the flame of his lamp and drew it closer to the fragment of papyrus that lay on an Arab table he had appropriated as a desk. Why did the beggars always have to come here by night, like thieves? Of course, thieves they certainly were, and the meanest sort—grave robbers.

The fellow named Ali leaned closer, exhaling full breath from a mouth full of blackened teeth that he framed by a grin. Wordsley wished there were a little more space in this rented room; it was a potter's storeroom where he and his makeshift desk and cot and boxes competed with bowls and jugs and heaps of little cups—and now an Arab—for the floor. "You see, *effendi*? Is it not what I promised?"

In reply, Wordsley pulled out a magnifying glass from his desk drawer to better examine the text. These hieroglyphs were time-worn, difficult to read, but this spoke in favor of the papyrus's authenticity. Forgery was an industry with these beggars; you could never quite trust them, but papyrus were beyond their clever skill. The industry had been lost, the script forgotten.

Out of habit, he picked up a pen and began to draw a facsimile of the papyrus. There was nothing here of any great interest, just another chapter from the *Book of the Dead* looted from the grave of some artisan or minor bureaucrat, a man of no known importance but wealthy enough at least to afford a proper burial and a scroll containing the spells necessary to ensure him prosperity in the afterlife to come.

"Where did you get it? The little pyramid that the American tore down and shipped downriver—from there, eh?"

"No, no, *effendi*. By decree of the pasha, what the American digs up belongs to the American. And he pays besides. This is from—it is from elsewhere."

Wordsley looked up sharply at the thief. "Was there anything else with this? Pottery, for example? Even ostraca, broken pottery? With writing or pictures upon it?" He had found interesting things written

But Wordsley was unmoved. A shilling was two piasters, enough to feed the thief and his family for a day. And he was sure that if the beggar was offering the papyrus to him now, doubtless the American had turned it down already. Phineas Bigham had no interest in common funeral texts, not the man who bought the head of the Sphinx itself and shipped it back to America as a museum exhibit.

In the end Ali accepted the shilling and left, assuring Wordsley that the starvation of his children was imminent. Wordsley poured himself a glass of claret to wash the taste of the transaction, as well as the dust, out of his mouth. Every corner of the room not taken up by the potter's stores held boxes of ostraca, potsherds, and scrolls, most untranscribed and untranslated, most likely as worthless as this one, but he did not dare risk the loss of any manuscript of potential significance. Too much had been lost already, too much was being lost even yet, thanks to the activities of tomb robbers and plunderers and in particular the greatest plunderer of them all, this American mountebank Bigham.

"Bigham!" The name was a curse on Wordsley's lips. Destroying everything in his quest for antiquities, forever obliterating the historical record of millennia, Phineas Bigham was hardly the first of the tomb robbers, but his dollars had inflicted more damage on the remains of ancient Egypt than centuries of conquering armies. His lavish bribery had purchased the pasha's license to carry off whatever he pleased, and his devastating methods of excavation left irreplaceable papyri torn and rotting amid the ruins he left in the wake of his search for the monumental statues and gold coffins of ancient pharaohs.

Wordsley had had hopes when he set out for Tukh, devoid of the great temples such as those at Luxor or Philae or Abu Simbel. Nothing, he thought, would attract the American here. But something had, nevertheless. The tumbledown pyramid was gone when he arrived two days ago, removed stone by stone; in fact, he had seen but not recognized it sitting on a wharf in Cairo, awaiting steamers to take it seaward as ballast to America, where it would be resurrected again. The graves, most ancient graves, that edged the farmers' fields had been stripped of their occupants and the gold and stone and ivory that had accompanied them in death. More than two thousand looted in a fortnight. Whatever else had stood in the vicinity of Tukh was gone too.

What could he do but salvage here? He felt like a gleaner following an army through fields of devastation. And there was something to glean, for the American had his own desires to satisfy. Only the finest manuscripts, with crisply drawn vignettes painted in delicate green, red, white, and gold, merited Bigham's interest. Wordsley had let it be known that he would pay for whatever the American had thrown aside, at least for as long as his funds held out.

Lighting a second lamp, he applied his attention now to the papyrus fragment on his desk. He copied it out, sign for sign, word for word, column for column, translating in his head. He knew the words before he even saw them: ordinary, ordinary, ordinary! Yet he

found the remains of such decayed in the sun-baked sand.



on potsherds, names, faces of kings. These might just date the papyrus. The Arab grinned in false apology. "No, *effendi*, pardon me, but there was nothing else at all, just this piece of writing. Very old, very genuine *anteekah*. Very valuable."

Wordsley snorted. "I'll give you a shilling." Payment enough for this beggar, and all Wordsley could afford, given the present state of his finances.

The would-be seller howled in offended outrage. Only a shilling for such a valuable antiquity? A genuine manuscript from the tomb of the kings? The Englishman insulted him with such an offer. He would take his find instead to the American, who would be sure to pay what it was truly worth.

did not consider his shilling entirely wasted, for perhaps the next manuscript Ali brought in would contain the name of some previously unknown king or god or spell.

There was the piece on which he had been working before the thief's arrival, for example: A new hymn to the Sun God Ra-Horakhty triumphant over his enemies at dawn. So much remained unknown and unexplained about the ancient Egyptian gods, so much they might never know, despite all that was left behind. It was now smashed by the chisel for the heads of pretty goddesses, torn up for amulets of gold and lapis lazuli.

Wordsley poured another glass of claret and dipped his pen again into the ink. So much to do.

In the next few days his labors were interrupted so often, by so many natives bearing artifacts for sale—papyri, scarabs, shabti, pottery jars, bits of mummified animals and birds—that he soon realized something was amiss. The vendors were sly; they said nothing, but it was not only in their silent smiles that Wordsley knew something out of the ordinary was happening.

The two thousand and more graves and tombs near Tukh had been of utmost antiquity: Wordsley had ascertained from interviews of the workmen that there were no scrolls among them, but rather ivory combs, fine stone vases, gold jewelry, and other things for which the American had paid handsomely. Although the *fellahin* were reluctant to admit it, the scrolls and ostraca he had been purchasing from them came from less ancient ruins south of the stolen pyramid. What they brought him now, however, came in such quantity and diversity that he knew they had discovered a new source.



So she had watched for century to help him while the cruel

So, having paid six piasters for an ostraca with the cartouche of a king he did not know—Neb-Khepru-Ra Tut-Ankh-Amun—Wordsley pushed himself away from his desk, called his servant Ahmed to bring his hat, and ventured out into the marketplace to investigate the situation.

Heat and sun glare and dust with the overpowering scents of dung from camels, asses, and the native Arabs met him. The skirling whine of flies was his greeting. Few people were abroad today, and all of those were women and girls and very small children. Virtually every man and every boy older than eight or ten seemed absent.

"Where is everyone?" he asked of the potter from whom he had rented the room. He wondered how many of his own pots the man had thrown to the ground, buried in dirt, and dug up again for some wide-eyed tourist sailing by in his *dahabeeyah*.

"With the American," was the reply.

"With the American? I thought Bigham had gone."

"He is gone, gone into the desert. He has hired most any man with a pair of legs, see?" The man displayed his crippled feet. "From here, from el-Ballas, from Naqada. They're all in the desert now, far up the wadi. Another *Biban el-Molouk* they have there, yes, it is said. Another Valley of the Kings. Oh, but your face, *effendi*, it is flushed. Come inside, come inside. It is too hot here. Beer, yes? Come inside. The Sun has made you ill."

Wordsley brushed away the old man's offer.

What had Phineas Bigham found? The objects the Arabs were bringing to Wordsley lately were undoubtedly more typical of Thebes than of this region. No one had ever reported such tombs or temples here before. *Terra incognita*! Overlooked by Napoleon's savants, missed by that Italian king of grave robbers Belzoni, could it be? The place would be destroyed, utterly and totally, and carted off to America before it was ever known in Egypt.

"He must be stopped—" Wordsley choked the words back as the potter regarded him coldly. The villagers would not treat kindly any one apt to thwart their benefactor. Regardless, Phineas Bigham had to be stopped before he raped another tomb, plundered another temple.

Wordsley strode rapidly back to his rented storeroom and shouted for Ahmed, who dutifully appeared and listened to instructions. He must prepare, at once, for an expedition into the hills. Donkeys, flour, water, whatever would be needed. There was no other way. Appeals to the local authorities would be futile. Bribes had placed the pasha squarely in the American's pocket. The British counsel, to whom Wordsley would naturally appeal, was interested only in the matter as far as it came to getting a share of the loot; the British Museum was Bigham's greatest rival in the antiquities trade.

So with great difficulty and expense a tent and supplies were

obtained, and donkeys to carry them, and an animal for Wordsley to ride. He was, alas, no great explorer, no doughty digger of tombs. He was ordinarily content to let others bring their manuscripts and scarabs and ostraca to him for deciphering. But he now had to press beyond that. His mission, if ever he had one, was clear and neither discomfort nor inconvenience would deter him. Bigham had gone into the desert and so Wordsley must follow. The gleaner would glean no longer. Time had come for the harvest to end.

It was an army. She had no other word to describe the host now camped in the wadi east of the tomb. The scent of smoke and cooking food rose from hundreds of campfires, mingling with the odors of dung from a thousand pack animals. There was a large tent that certainly belonged to a king or general. She saw no swords or bows, not even the explosive firearms of

recent invaders, but it was an army of many hundreds advancing toward her, toward the hidden tomb where her Lord was chained.

Dismayed, she realized why they must have come: The bait by which she lured robbers into her hands had now succeeded beyond her purpose, bringing appalling numbers of them. If they should happen by some evil chance to discover the location of her Lord's tomb, to expose it, even for an instant, to the Sun ...

But they could not possibly remain in this region for long, she tried to reassure herself. Not such a great number of men. There was not enough water, they would drink the wells dry—what few wells there were.

And these were only *fellahin*, superstitious and ignorant. She knew how to prey upon their fears. Had not she and her brothers and sisters once inspired their forefathers to prayer and to sacrifice, to raise tombs high into the sky? To dig them deep into the earth? She knew these people. Once, she had owned them.

Now she descended to the camp and took one of the lives that were hers. When the others woke in the morning they would remember whose land this was, whose land this had always been.

Napoleon's army had not made such tracks through the Egyptian desert, of that Wordsley was sure. These parched desert hills had never before seen such a traffic, at least of the living. Once the dead in their thousands had come this way, but one by one, dragged on sledges and laid to rest in shallow graves or mud-brick *mastabas*. Not in such a multitude as this! He followed the trail as it wound into the high hills, pausing for one last glimpse of the green fields. His donkey boys trudged forward, urging their animals, sparing no such glance, as if it were ill luck to covet the gift of the river being left behind.

Already Wordsley's lips felt parched. Never had he traveled this far into the desert. Its vastness, even cut up by the hills, surprised him. Along the river, there was a feeling of closeness, of definition, brought about by the demarcation between Black Land and Red, but here there was no definition save that between earth and sky. It was entirely the Red Land below and the heavens above. Pharaohs had once hunted lion and ostrich here, praised the setting Sun here, buried their dead here. The beasts were gone now, but the Sun and the dead remained, always. The brown hills seemed capable of swallowing a man, of sucking him dry.

For an interminable time they followed the tracks. Wordsley began to wonder if the desert might have evaporated Bigham and his work gangs. It was the heat, worrying at his head, that gave rise to such fanciful notions.

"How much farther?" he asked of Ahmed.

Ahmed shrugged and said, "Nearby. Nearby." Nearby! Nothing could be near here, Wordsley despaired. He thought of going back, of abandoning the past to the depredations of the American, but just at that moment his donkey, as if offended by this notion, stumbled, pitching him off head-first into the sand. His hand, breaking his fall, closed on an object.

The *fellahin* swarmed upon him, eager to assist him back to his feet, but Wordsley beat them off with his riding crop so fiercely that one might have thought that these poor bedraggled sons of Adam had pulled him off the beast to rob him. Freed of them, his attention was wholly for what his hand had found.

It was a shallow grave in a hollow in the rocks filled by drifting sand. Something Bigham had already plundered, surely, Wordsley thought. Nonetheless his fall had exposed—he fell back to his knees and scooped sand away with his bare hands—a black, mummified

Wordsley glanced at the hills. Or had it washed down, perhaps years ago? Assuredly it had come from the same unrecorded place as the other trinkets the Arabs had been bringing him.

This find settled his resolve. Abandon the past to the likes of the American? Never, *inshallah*.

He had not lied to his Egyptian companions; Bigham would not pay one American cent for the scarab. For so fine a mummy, so perfectly preserved, however—ah! Might he not trade papyri, pottery bowls, flakes of limestone? Items Bigham and his American public considered worthless, but oh! so valuable to the true scholar. The British Museum would display them proudly.

Wordsley called the donkey boys, who under his direction obediently placed the dried corpse in a linen sheet, and then in two more. Ahmed rearranged his packs, having to leave behind only a sack of flour to accommodate their new traveling companion. He

after century ... powerless jaws bit and severed his limbs ...



foot, miraculously not reduced to bleached white bone as so many other remains had been. He began to dig the grave out with his hands, then thought of Ahmed and the donkey boys who were standing about, providing him shade but no other assistance.

"Dig," he ordered.

"La, la," they replied.

"What? Why 'no'? You dig them up every night you can. Why not now?"

"The *ferengi* will see," Ahmed said, "turn us over to the authorities."

"There's a *ferengi* leading scores of your uncles and brothers out in the desert at this very moment, doing just such a thing. Why not for me?"

"The pasha. The American has his *firman*. For anyone else, it is forbidden."

With an exasperated rattle in his throat, Wordsley continued digging with his own bare hands. In little time he had revealed a dried husk of a corpse, its skin nearly black, marvelously intact and preserved. He considered it sheer luck that Bigham had not himself stumbled upon this poor wretch, in the course of his trek through this place. Not so much as a stitch of linen clothed his limbs. He began to dig a wider hole, and when it occurred to the Arabs that there might be *anteekahs* to be found, they abandoned their reservations and joined in the search. But there was nothing. Not a potsherd, not a scrap of leather, not a stone knife. Wordsley was disappointed. The only thing of value here was the body itself.

Nevertheless, the men seemed to have found something of interest. Wordsley approached unnoticed, so engrossed were they upon their find. They were passing something small among themselves and did not at first notice that a *ferengi* hand had interposed itself to join in the sharing. Wordsley found himself holding a jasper scarab, neatly incised on its belly with hieroglyphic writing. It did not belong in this wretched grave, of that he was certain.

"Effendi! Effendi, we did not know! We thought it nothing, a trifle, a bauble of modern manufacture for the other *ferengi*, not a learned scholar such as yourself. Abdullah makes them just so—"

"Never mind. Bigham would pay you nothing for this; he must have a hundred thousand already. Here." He handed one of them a shilling. This satisfied their business with him, but now they had to settle the coin out among themselves. They would be at it for generations, Wordsley reflected, knowing Arab ways.

He fingered the stone beetle, making out the sense of the glyphs. It was a small heart-scarab, inscribed with a formula from the *Book of the Dead* for a man named Nakht.

Was this naked mummy, then, this Nakht? Had the scarab been overlooked by whomever first plundered this pathetic burial place?

swore them to silence. The mummy was Wordsley's coin, and he would lay it upon the American's counter in due time.

The trail led to a broad encampment in a state of pandemonium. Nearly the entire town was here, and every man who could be hired from el-Ballas and Naqada, excavating the sands of the wadi, scouring it like industrious ants. They probed the rocks, they dug, they shifted the sand by the basket-load, a vast effort mobilized, all to earn the American's gold.

Bigham strode among them like a king. His striped waistcoat of French silk stretched across an ample expanse of belly and sported a brave festoon of watch chain, fobs, and seals. A floppy brimmed hat covered his face, and a parasol rested over his left shoulder. His right hand, encumbered by the dwindling remains of a cheroot, gestured exuberantly as he spoke to the foremen who came and left his presence like bees at a hive. He was possessed of a booming voice, but above the cacophony Wordsley could not make it out. Did Bigham even speak Arabic? Wordsley doubted it. There were enough men in the villages who spoke enough English for Bigham to get by. And they all understood his desire, in any case: *anteekahs*.

The entrance of Wordsley and his party into the wadi did not go unnoticed. Wordsley had scarcely time to take in the scene before six men posted as guards descended upon them. Only the realization that among the newcomers were their younger brothers stopped the men from delivering blows then and there. One of the guardsmen ran for a foreman, who as Wordsley watched ran to another foreman (who likely spoke better English), who at last ran to Bigham. Bigham stared dumbly at him, perhaps not realizing what this Egyptian was trying to say to him. He turned and walked straight for Wordsley. His hearty approach reminded Wordsley of a new-made man who has just caught sight of his country neighbor at a London dinner party.

"Say, now! Professor! Wordsley, isn't it? Aren't I just glad to meet a man of the Queen's tongue in these desert parts!" The guards scattered at Bigham's approach, and Wordsley's own hired party melded into Bigham's, leaving him quite alone except for his donkeys and, anonymous among the parcels, the mummy.

The American's good humor was not reciprocated. "See here, now, Bigham," Wordsley said sharply, "what is all this?"

"Only the find of the century, that's all! The tombs of kings!" Wordsley looked around him at the desolation. "All I see here is rock and sand."

Bigham's laugh came from his belly. "All you see, yes! But they see more than we do!" He aimed with his parasol at the *fellahin*. "These rascals have been living out here robbing graves for generations. For centuries. They know where to find gold where all a white man can

see is sand. Ivory, like pebbles to them." He beckoned Wordsley closer and pulled something strung on a thong out from under his shirt. "Look here! Solid gold, this is! That's lapis from Afghanistan, mark me. And have you ever seen such a big and brilliant carnelian? And here—that sign means a bank, doesn't it?"

With ill grace, Wordsley bent to examine the artifact, a small gold pectoral in the graceful form of the solar barque, with a carnelian cabochon as the disk of the Sun sitting amidships. Unwillingly, he made out the royal cartouche—Ramses! Ozymandias!—leave it to Bigham, an ignorant mountebank, but he knew enough at least to recognize that aspect of the hieroglyphic script, if it meant profit.

"That fellow brought it to me," he told Wordsley, expansively pointing out the Arab with the most thievish grin of the lot. "Solid gold. Buried right out here in these rocks. And where there's one king, you know, there's a whole raft of them!" He patted his chest, secreting his treasure back beneath his vest.



When the others woke in the whose land this was, whose

Unhappily, Wordsley found himself confirming all of Bigham's fond assumptions. The hieroglyphic inscription on the pectoral proved it had belonged to a royal personage of ancient Egypt. It was indeed all too likely that Bigham had discovered another valley of buried kings, hidden up to now from tomb robbers and other looters over millennia.

"Now look here, Bigham," he began firmly, "if this find is genuine—if, I say—then this is a matter for scholars to investigate. Properly. Carefully. Artifacts should be handled scrupulously. Inscriptions copied. Not—" He waved his arm to indicate Bigham's army of workers. "Not this."

"Pshaw," scoffed Bigham. "Don't tell me you're worried about a few mummies! Why, it's not as if they were Christians!"

"You don't understand, I'm talking about knowledge here, precious knowledge lost forever in the hunt for treasure! There is none of this in the *Description de L'Égypte*. You won't find it in Lepsius's *Denkmäler*. Unpublished, utterly unknown, unseen by European—American—eyes. What you propose—what you're doing—is vandalism!"

Bigham frowned. "And were it not for me it would remain utterly unknown, unseen by white eyes. People come from everywhere on Earth to see the treasures in my museum—they call it one of the Wonders of the World. Why, before I dug it up, the Sphinx was buried up to its neck in sand! I saved it, that's what I did, saved it for the ages!"

And now it sits decapitated, Wordsley forbore to reply. Instead, he adopted a conciliatory tone. "But you know what can happen when diggers are careless, what they can destroy or overlook by mistake. Who among your men will recognize if one of those potsherders you order him to throw away might be another Rosetta Stone?"

"Well, yes, you're right, it pays to be careful. That block, plain that it is, makes a fine display," Bigham agreed. "And as I was saying, I can use a fellow like you, who can speak to these natives, who can read those picture-scribbles. I'm sure I can make it worth your while."

Retro me *Sathanas*! Wordsley thought, with his first impulse to turn his back on the tempter. And yet... the pectoral was undeniably authentic. What other wonders lay buried here beneath these sands? What discoveries might he not make, if only Bigham allowed him access to them?

Which reminded him...

"I stumbled on something you might find interesting," he said, turning to beckon to his servants. "It's a mummy, actually, but the condition is extraordinary! You might think it had been buried only yesterday." He finally picked a face out of the throng surrounding

them. "Ahmed! Bring me that bundle from the donkey."

Ahmed carefully untied the bundle, laid it on the ground. Wordsley impatiently bent to unroll it. The desiccated body was quite light, yet every detail was so perfectly preserved, down to the circumscribed tip of the man's most private part. "You see what I mean," he began to tell Bigham. "I suppose grave robbers must have found this fellow, smashed in his coffin, stripped the body of anything valuable, then left him like this for the sand to bury over again. It was only a matter of chance that I found him—"

But at that moment a terrible cry broke out from among the bystanders who had gathered. "El-Rasul!"

"What?" Bigham expostulated, "What are they caterwauling about now? I can't figure out two words of that damned gibberish."

With some difficulty, Wordsley managed to make out the wails of the natives, who were all backing fearfully away from the mummy, making signs against evil. "They say... they know this man! He

was a colleague of theirs, another tomb robber. And—they say he was taken one night by some sort of demon."

A time later, Wordsley reclined, ill at ease, on the cushions in Bigham's sumptuous tent, sipped the thick, strong coffee brought by Bigham's servant, and cursed himself for accepting the American's hospitality. Among the Arabs, hospitality made a sacred bond. Wordsley felt himself a traitor of sorts, as if he had betrayed his principles, allying himself with the enemy for a simple cup of coffee.

Yet Bigham's pavilion was most decidedly more opulent than the potter's storeroom, and as the American said, they were two white men and Christians here, alone in a throng of superstitious savages. The servant in his slippers crouched miserably outside the entrance, crooning some spell to himself, invoking protection against the evils of the night.

With some difficulty, Wordsley had elicited the tale: According to the nearby villagers—grave robbers by hereditary occupation—this region was said to be haunted. A *sheytana* lurked among the rocks, a she-demon or *ghul* who walked at night and could suck a man's life and soul from his body, leaving him nothing but a husk.

Since Bigham had begun operations here, one or two men each night had been reported missing by the Arab foremen. He hadn't given it much thought, native workers sneaking off. But now, with the discovery of the thief's body...

"Demons?" Wordsley wondered.

"Humbug!" Bigham expostulated. "In the morning they'll come here wanting their wages raised, that's what this is all about! Why, you leave a man's corpse out in the desert that way, under the Sun, it'll shrivel right up like any mummy! Isn't that so, Professor?" he demanded.

Wordsley frowned silently into the sludge at the bottom of his cup. He hated being made to look a fool. What kind of learned man could not tell the difference between a week-old corpse and a three-thousand-year-old mummy? Yet up until an hour ago he would have insisted, would have sworn that no amount of sunlight and desiccation could have produced a corpse in the condition of the grave robber. Impossible, he would have said. And there was the amulet found on the body—the scarab. But of course the man had stolen it from some tomb. Any other explanation was flatly impossible. "Superstition," he said shortly.

"That's all it is," Bigham agreed, "just superstition and humbug—

gery. Why, when I lay that fellow out in a gold box, put a crown and a fake beard on him, he'll be as good as any pharaoh ever born."

"What?" Wordsley exclaimed. "You don't mean to exhibit the wretched thing?"

"And why not? You said it yourself, that fellow is the best-preserved mummy I've come across in a long time. He'll be a capital exhibit. It's not likely any of his relatives is going to recognize him in a museum case in Philadelphia, now, is it?"

"But—that's—" Wordsley sputtered. He hated sputtering. "That would be fraudulent!"

"Pshaw, as if anyone would care about that! Look here, Professor, I know what the public wants to see! They want to see mummies, sure they do. But you know what kind of condition most of these old kings are in when we find them—gone half to dust, chests caved in, ribs and bones showing through everywhere. You should see what we've dug up so far—not a one of them worth a plugged cent! That's not the

He sat erect. The blanket fell from his chest.

The sudden searing light made her fling up her cloak to protect herself. An afterimage of the solar barque was branded across her vision. This one was under the Oppressor's protection! He wore his sign, the image of the Sun!

Half-blind, she stumbled from the tent, tripped over a bundle of rags, one of the king's slaves, wrapped in fitful, demon-haunted dreams. She left him drained and empty, she passed through the camp like an angel of death—those words from one of their minds: *angel of death*, and she understood that an angel was a messenger of god.

But it was not a messenger who walked among them tonight. It was the goddess herself. It was death.

Wordsley awoke from a dream in which untold riches had beckoned to him like the harlot of Babylon. He had only

morning they would remember land this had always been.



thing to bring in the big crowds. Not like your fellow outside, there. No, he has a fine career ahead of him in my exhibition hall." Then he scowled. "Unless those relatives of his get too greedy and queer the deal. I'll not pay a cent more than five dollars for him, mark my word."

"But were there artifacts buried with the mummies you've found? Were there *papyri*?"

"Nothing worth bothering with. A few cheap scarabs, that's all. Some scarabs. You know, the sort of thing these thieves have been bringing to you in Tukh. Yes, I know, I know what they've been up to. There may be some better things to your eyes. You can go through it all in the morning, if you'd like, but I can tell you right now, there's nothing worth a plugged cent."

Wordsley could only shake his head. How could he reason with such a man as this? How could he price knowledge in terms of pounds and pence, dollars and cents?

FOR SEVERAL NIGHTS NOW, she had soured fear in the camp, in these peasants, these *fellahin*. She could taste it in their dreams, in their minds. Yet they remained here, swarming over the sands with their tools and their baskets, probing deeper and further into secrets they must not be allowed to uncover. Greed, as it had so often, proved greater than fear. Once this had been in her favor: Did they not always return eventually to the salted hills, no matter how many of their kinsmen she took? They were like cattle that did not know pasture from slaughterhouse. But now that she wanted them to fly off, they would not. She had bound them too well with gold chains about their hearts.

Tonight, then: Their king.

Unseen by beguiled mortal eyes she passed through the camp, through the hundreds of men who slept rolled in their ragged garments by the campfires, to the great pavilion of the king. There was a much smaller tent pitched beside it, and within glowed a faint light, illuminating the figure of a man bent over some work. She briefly paused, touched his mind. A scribe, a servant of the king. He was poring over some odd scraps and fragments of funerary texts, searching. She was briefly curious to have met one who knew the old script, but this was not the one who commanded the army, not the one she must find.

She moved on to the greater tent of the king. Here the dreams were all of greed and grandeur, palaces and wealth. But in a moment she would reduce it all to a shriveled husk, and the rest, who fed from the grain he scattered from his hand, would then disperse.

She beckoned, she summoned him to her.

to give up his quest and it would all be his, gold from the tombs of Oriental kings. His own will had won out in the end, but he was sweat-matted and shaking, as if in one of those Nile fevers. He inspected himself for stings or bites, but found none as he washed himself from a half-empty basin of tepid water. "Ahmed!" he called, but the servant did not appear. He cursed the fellow, and his poor night's sleep, that had put him in such a state. Poor sleep and the wicked temptations of Bigham. Curse him, as well!

Wordsley examined his work of the night before. He had sketched a dozen scarabs, several pieces of funerary jewelry, knowing that they would soon be packed up in crates and shipped across the Atlantic. Although he valued them equally, none of the objects had been very interesting to him, none of them anything new. Yet he dutifully noted names, variants in spelling and in hieroglyphs, in his epigraphic catalog.

One object alone had held some promise. It was the broken half of a square wooden tile, caught up in with the scarabs as dunnage. If he could find the rest of it, that would be worth pursuing, for it was nothing less than a bookplate, a tag once tied to a papyrus scroll, and the title, so much of it as he could make out, was *The Chapter of Lying Bound*. An unknown text!

The camp was quiet, preternaturally so. Already the morning Sun was fierce, even through the open flap of the tent. Aware of his thirst, Wordsley looked around for his servant with his morning coffee. "Ahmed!" he called out, "Ahmed! Damn his heathen soul, where is that beggar?"

But it wasn't the faithless Ahmed who burst into his tent, it was a red-faced Bigham, shouting, "Damn you, Wordsley!"

"What?" Too astonished to protest the man's rudeness. "What do you mean?"

"The bastards! The bastards up and left me, almost to a man! When the pasha hears about this—oh!" He raged in the most vile obscenities, which seemed to serve the purpose of restraining his fist from Wordsley's face. "It was that mummy of yours, that you brought into my camp! My camp, Wordsley!"

Wordsley was dumbfounded. True, the Arabs were a superstitious race, but hitherto all could be overcome by the appropriate application of *bakshish*. Still, why should they be upset by one mummy? He suspected other reasons at work. "Did you cut their wagers? Did you threaten to?"

"No! No, no! I'll show you! Come see for yourself!"

Bigham flung open the tent, slashing at the air with his parasol. "Look! Look, you!

"One mummy, you brought me—just one—and the beggars saw how I paid you for it. Oh, it's the bazaar! They live to bargain! You can't show the first bit of enthusiasm, or they'll skin you, Wordsley, they'll dicker you down to your combinations! Mummies—that's what they think I want, and so they tell themselves, 'Oh, here is the American's price. That is what he wants. Oh, them we have aplenty, and aplenty we'll give him.' Dozens of them, Wordsley! They left me dozens of them, and I don't want them all. Mummies! I want the gold, dammit, the jewels, oh, to hell, I want—"

Up until this point it was not clear to Wordsley what it was that the *fellahin* had given to Bigham. But Bigham stopped at the inert figure, apparently dozing in the shade of Wordsley's tent. With his folded parasol, he prodded it, just a short stab, and it fell over with a dry thud.

"See! They're all over camp. Dozens of them! Dozens of damned, worthless mummies! Not a workman in sight!"

"But ... Ahmed! This is—"

"What?" Bigham demanded impatiently. "Your servant's in on this scheme, too?"

"No, no. I think I know that man. That corpse. My servant, Ahmed."

"Now, you're not putting stock in that Arab hoodoo? You've been too long in Egypt, Professor. You've absorbed their superstitions."

"Yes, but—"

Bigham moved forward for a closer look at the mummy. "Come on, now! You may see a resemblance to your man, but then I see a resemblance of that face of yours to that of Judas in the *Last Supper*, and I don't go about accusing you of the crime now, do I? If I knew that beggar, I'd whip his hide and have him digging in these hills as he ought to. I'll tan their hides yet. Dig, you desecrated monsters!"

"No, really, Bigham! I insist!" Wordsley followed the American to a heap of rags in the sand that proved on closer examination to be another desecrated corpse. "Look here! Look how they are dressed! These are modern robes! Just what the *fellahin* wear. They can't be old mummies! It's quite impossible!"

"No, you look at it, man!" They wandered among the mummies, not daring to venture too near any one. "Dry as old bone and leather! All of them! All the juice sucked out. Mummies aren't made overnight. And even if they have made some improvements since Ozymandias's day, Musselmen or even the poor Copts aren't going to submit their brethren to that heathen practice! Why, it's likely the one thing Musselman and Copt will agree upon. Which leaves us with the question of how they got into the robes. Either the villagers put the robes on these dead creatures—for whatever reason we can guess until the sacred cows come home—or these are old clothes, old as the mummies."



A [she-demon] lurked among night and could suck a man's

But that was simply absurd, so much so that Wordsley knelt down to more closely examine the disputed remains of the mummy at his own tent. The features, reduced to leather as they were, with the lips pulled back from the teeth, were nonetheless very much like those of Ahmed. Wordsley then looked in the purse beneath the mummy's robes.

"Ah! Now, you just look at this!" he cried triumphantly, holding up for Bigham's inspection the shilling he had found. "Tell me how you account for this coin, not so lately removed from my own purse! No, I tell you, these are our own men, this is my servant Ahmed. Something—I'm not saying any supernatural agency, I'm not saying that, but something has done this to them! A geologic or atmospheric event from which we were protected by our tents."

Bigham, with ill grace, discontinued asserting his own theory of the events. Together they moved out across the sands of the camp, counting the mummified figures strewn about the place.

"Fifty-six of them," Bigham said at last.

"And the rest?"

"Why, run away! The cowardly beggars ran away! I had four hundred men and boys crawling this wadi. Now this! A camp full of worthless corpses and the rest of them all skulked off in the night!" Bigham's sullen tone made it clear that he knew this was all some sinister, if yet unexplained, plot to deprive him of his workers. "Listen, Wordsley, I'll make a deal with you. You go back to Tukh, tell those Arabs that I'm expecting them back here, working, just as we agreed. They can have their wages, as before, and I'll pretend that none of this ever happened." Under his breath he muttered, "None of your she-demons, your *ghûl*. None of that bunkum."

Wordsley stared at the face that might have been Ahmed's, then at Bigham's, not entirely sure which made him more uncomfortable. "That is your deal with the Arabs. What is your deal with me?" He wasn't certain that he wanted to hear it. That dream of his. The temptation, the serpent's voice.

But while the Arabs might not have liked Bigham's price, the American certainly knew Wordsley's. "Every scrap of papyrus I find. Any trinket with the littlest bit of glyph that's not museum-worthy. It's yours. Crated up and shipped wherever you wish. Ink and paper to do your drawing. Candle, lamp, whatever you want to work with. And you may have inspection of everything—reliefs, inscriptions, coffins, whatever. Copy it all. Publish it all, if that's what you like! Send the printer's bill to me. There may even be a job for you in Philadelphia, if you want it."

Wordsley stared at the hills that held—what? He still had the bookplate in his pocket, the half of it. What he would give for the rest! What he would give for the scroll to which it had once been tied! Sell his soul for a papyrus?

"It is agreed, then. Give me your donkey—or did the *ghûl* take that too?"

WORDSLEY RETURNED THREE DAYS LATER. BESIDES the ass given to him by Bigham, he had a string of six donkeys with him, and half again as many men.

"The rest are coming tomorrow?" Bigham demanded.

"The rest are not coming tomorrow or the next day or ever again," Wordsley sighed. "They are too frightened of the *ghûl*. I went to the Copts, too, but none would approach the Hill of Lîlîth. I even offered them more wages—"

"What? You offered the beggars more? And they still won't come?"

"They're afraid!" Wordsley exclaimed, weary and exasperated from his futile journey. "Do you blame them? There are fifty men dead in this camp, and no way to account for it."

"Bogeys and boggarts!" Bigham howled, throwing up his hands. "Well, that does it! I can't do anything with nine men. Have them crate up what we've got now and load it on the donkeys. What a poor-looking team they are too—men and beast, matched!"

"You are quitting, then?" Wordsley could scarcely believe this, nor the pang of regret that he himself felt. He might have saved the hills from rape, but he was losing his papyrus.

"No!" Bigham swelled with determination, and Wordsley found himself brightening, hating himself for it. "No tribe of flea-bitten Arabs is going to get the better of Phineas Bigham! They'll see what

American ingenuity can do! I'll show them! I'll show the whole world! Damned if I don't!"

The army had gone. The Lady had defeated them, drank their lives until she was full and sated. If only she had been able to lay her touch upon their king, but he was protected by the Oppressor's sign.

Still, he had gone and taken his army with him. She had won, she had conquered. Her concern had been groundless, after all. They were no more than any other host that had invaded the Red Land and the Black over the centuries.

She lay beside her Lord that night, kissed his fettered limbs, each so perfect and fine. She wept for him, for his pain, for his suffering. But the lives she had taken would spare him for two cycles of the Moon, for that many sunrises, each time the Serpent woke.

He at once sought her comfort and comforted her. So it had always been between them. So it would be until the end of time.

Wordsley gave little thought to Bigham's whereabouts. The American had taken himself off, removing all temptation with him, and it was just as well. The secrets of the desert remained inviolate and undespoiled, and it was surely just as well.

He had done as agreed, with the assistance of those few Arabs he had convinced to return with him, offering them doubled wages. Bigham's few initial finds had all been gathered up, boxed and bundled, loaded onto the donkeys for transport. There was nothing the American had valued sufficiently to take with him, nothing except for the golden pectoral which had once belonged to a king—that, Bigham kept on his person always.

But Wordsley had been conscientious. All the spoils of the American's dig were currently reposing in the potter's house, as carefully stored as if they had been the most costly and delicate antiquities. He was cataloging them now, in Bigham's absence, labeling each piece and taking thorough notes, copying all inscriptions.

The finds, despite the initial promise of the golden pectoral of which Bigham was so fond, must have been a disappointment to the hopeful collector. So far tonight, Wordsley had cataloged a dozen scarabs, an ivory statuette of a king or god (it was too crudely done to be sure) wearing the White Crown and a false beard, a necklace of amethyst beads. Curious, he thought, that they were found so scattered, not as if placed in some ancient cache by grave robbers to hide their crime or priests to hide their sacred objects. He had counted items from no fewer than 20 different tombs, but it seemed inconceivable that they could all be in those hills. There was nothing else like them in the area, nothing at all.

unwrap it. The object inside was a clay jar in fragments, a piece of no intrinsic interest to any collector with Bigham's tastes, but Wordsley's attention was piqued as he saw it was filled with scrolls. Poking out through the still-intact mouth he could see the broken end of a wooden tile, a bookplate.

He sprang instantly to his feet to rummage among the items on a shelf. Ah! Yes! There it was! The other half of the bookplate he had encountered in the camp. Fetching it to the table, he matched it to the broken bookplate in the jar. Despite the worn edges, they clearly fit together into a single whole.

The bookplate, now reunited, revealed the complete title: *The Chapters of Lying Bound in Darkness and of Coming Forth by Night*. Wordsley's heartbeat quickened. Indeed, this must be a new funerary text! Not merely a new chapter of the *Book of the Dead* or of the *Book of Breathings*, but a genuinely new corpus of text!

He worked methodically, never hurrying the task in his excitement, putting aside the pottery fragments and removing several scrolls from the broken jar. The papyri were old and brittle and crumbled into fragments at his touch. He kept each in its own box, so that they would not become confused like a jumble of so many jigsaw puzzles.

With hands that threatened to tremble, he assembled his ink and paper and several lamps. Where to start? At the beginning, surely, but which scroll was first? It did not really matter. Order would come from chaos soon enough. He lit all of the lamps, that he might see every trace of ink on the ancient, yellowed surfaces of the papyri. They were old and exceptionally fragile; once, surely, they had been very fine. Along the top of the text ran a register of repeated solar barques painted in gold.

It was near dawn by the time he began his transcription, murmuring as he wrote: "*The Chapter of Binding the Limbs ...*"

At that very moment, as the desert stirred with the presentiment of sunrise, a vagrant breeze swept the sand and sifted a few grains into the abandoned excavations. In time, the sand would cover it all once again, and the newly made dead would sleep alongside the old.

The desert would prevail, as it always had. Even more than gods, the desert was immortal.

Wordsley stirred in his sleep, lying half-clothed and sweating on his rumpled cot. What was that infernal din? Jackals—no, no, it was the Arabs and their dreadful noises.

Suddenly, his eyes flew open. There was a sound he knew! That piercing shriek—it could only be a steam whistle!

The Arab ululation rose to an answering wail.

the rocks ... who walked at
life and soul from his body ...



Ah, well. There was much to learn, so very much. And that finished one crate.

He stood, stretching cramped muscles, and crossed the room to brew himself a fresh pot of tea. Since Ahmed's death, he had no servant; none of the Arabs would hire themselves to him, and he was aware that they made gestures to avert a curse whenever he crossed their path in the streets or marketplace. Of course, Wordsley was as little susceptible to such a notion as Bigham had been, but still, when he considered the mystery, it was hard to account for so many sudden deaths among the workers. Sunstroke, he supposed it must have been. What other explanation could there be?

Refreshed by the tea, he pulled another crate out from the heap and carried it to his work table. Inside, he found a bundle of rags and heard the unmistakable clink of broken pottery as he began to

Fearing the worst, fearing riot and chaos, Wordsley flung on his clothes and rushed toward the marketplace. The stalls were all deserted, but ahead, along the riverbank, he could discern the mob gathered. He pushed his way through, hearing as he did the repeated *ferengi!* *ferengi!* And other words as well: Monster, demon ... machine ...

But even Wordsley was taken aback when he finally saw the apparition that had come up the river. A monster indeed! A veritable behemoth of mechanical monstrosity.

As if to answer him, the thing whistled again. That it was a steam engine of some sort, he was well aware. But a sort that he had never seen, or imagined seeing, in all his life. A massive boom swung out from the base, supported by a system of beams, pulleys, and chains, and from it was suspended the maw of a giant scoop.

Although he had never seen it before, Wordsley instantly grasped what it was, what it was meant to do. A shovel! A giant, steam-powered shovel! "Bigham!" he cursed out loud, and began to shove through the native throng with no regard for the persons he might displace.

His worst suspicions were realized as soon as he came closer to the riverbank. Aboard the barge in all the puffed-up pride of ownership stood the American under his customary parasol.

Wordsley shook his fist. "Bigham! We had a gentlemen's agreement, Bigham! You'll not cheat me out of it, you colonial cretin!"

The American, on board the barge and too far away to hear Wordsley's maledictions, returned a wave of exuberant misunderstanding.

Under the direction of several Europeans, native workers on the boat were sliding a massive gangplank into place. Then, with another blood-curdling whistle, the machine began to move!

The mob on shore shrieked. The Egyptians turned to flee, trampling one another in their panicked rush to escape the advancing behemoth. Wordsley gave thanks that he had by this time pressed forward toward what had been the front of the crowd, or he might surely have been caught in the midst of it. As it was, he was now well placed to watch the huge, ungainly machine as it clanked and clattered inch by inch down the sagging gangplank, moving quite under its own power!

Wordsley had heard of such marvels, had read of them in the London papers, but never, never had he expected to see one, not here, in this benighted, backward part of the world, where donkeys still turned water wheels in just the same way as they had done since the days of the pharaohs! He had a moment of hope, when it seemed that surely the vast weight of the machine would crack the gangplank and send the monstrosity to the muddy bottom of the Nile, but no, it continued to inch forward until it stood at last safe on the shore, shuddering and clattering and belching smoke and steam.

"Wordsley!" came a shout over the ungodly din. "Wordsley!"

With an effort, he stood still to let the American approach.

"There you are! I thought it was you! So, you're still here! Well, what do you think?" Bigham turned to gesture with expansive pride at his appalling mechanical prodigy, and without waiting to hear a reply, "It's an Otis Shovel. Built in Philadelphia, by God! I told you American ingenuity would show them! It can do the work of a hundred men, Wordsley! One machine, the work of a hundred men! I tell you, this is the future!"

He shook his parasol at the distant crowd of natives, whose fearful wailing was drowned out by the roar and clatter of the machine. "I'll show them! They think they can hoodwink Phineas Bigham, do they? Filthy beggars, deserting me, leaving mummies all over the camp—so they want more wages, do they? Why, then let them take

"You had this shipped all the way from Philadelphia?" Wordsley asked, distracted by wonder.

"From Russia! From the Crimea," Bigham boasted. "It was shipped there in the year forty-one to dredge the harbors. I had my agents locate the nearest available machine and offer the highest price for it. Telegraphy, Wordsley! Dynamite! Steam power! They can lick any of your she-demons ten ways from Sunday, and you can bet on that!"

Wordsley cleared his throat. "I've sorted and cataloged those pieces you left me—"

"Trash!" Bigham dismissed it with a snort. "All of it, worthless! Keep it, if you want it—keep it all! Now that I have old Otis here, I'm going to find those royal tombs! See if I don't! Treasures that will dazzle your eyes! They're out there, Wordsley, I know they are! And I'm going to have them! America, by God, is going to have them!"

This time the approach of the invading army was signaled not by a cloud of dust, as it had always been, but a dark cloud of smoke; not by the braying of asses, but the clang of metal and the hiss of steam. Of all the most hideous monsters of the Underworld, there was nothing to compare with this smoking beast, but she was certain that it must have been spawned in the pits of fire where the enemies of the Oppressor were sent to be consumed. Its teeth were of iron, and its breath was flame.

She looked upon it, and she uttered a spell of protection:

*Now though I stand in fire, yet I am not consumed,
For the fire shall not harm me,
Nor shall the flame of the fire touch me,
Nor shall the heat of the fire burn me,
And the Fiend shall be powerless before me,
And my enemy shall be powerless to destroy me,
As I pass through the fire unconsumed.*

Yet still she was afraid.

If Wordsley had only consulted his better judgment, he would have left Bigham and his steam juggernaut to enter the desert alone, with only the dour Scots engineers he had hired to minister to the needs of the iron beast and tend to the crates marked Giant Powder Company. His better judgment wanted nothing more to do with the man and his grandiose, demented notions. He had escaped once already, and brought forth a treasure vastly more precious than any gold or lapis or electrum that Bigham might find in the tombs of kings: The manuscript, previously unknown, rescued from the destruction of Bigham's vision of the future.

During the months of the American's absence, he had spent hours, countless hours, meticulously copying, transcribing, and translating the hieroglyphs, committing them to memory. He had done

... she passed through the camp
she understood that an angel



a look at this! A hundred men, Wordsley, and it isn't going to strike for more wages, or take sick in the middle of a work day, or start gibbering any superstitious bunkum about she-demons!

"American know-how! I'll tell you, Wordsley, for years and years we Americans stood by the sidelines as you Europeans grabbed it all: Greece, Rome—all of it. I hated that. So I earned my fortune in steel and whiskey, and came here to bring America something of a past our ancestors left behind for freedom. It's not necessary to trade off history for liberty, you know. It's not. And so now in Philadelphia the Sphinx's head sits a block away from the Liberty Bell. And this, this fine Otis Shovel, is what they cast in Philadelphia nowadays! Oh, I'm not finished, Wordsley, not by a long shot. I won't let those black beggars beat me, I'll be damned if I will!"

what he could to restore the original brittle, crumbling papyri. But the text—so distinct with its frieze of solar barques—had broken off abruptly, and nowhere in all the boxes, bundles, and crates he'd brought back with him from the desert had there been another scroll to complete it. The rest of it had to be out there, still!

Yet what hope was there of retrieving it from out of the iron maw of Bigham's mechanical monstrosity? The steam excavator would scoop up sand by the ton, bite through explosive-shaken stone, devour a complete necropolis in a single day, in search of treasure Bigham considered worthy. The devastation would be incalculable!

He must stop him!

At first, he had entertained the hope that the behemoth might collapse of its own weight into the desert. The steam shovel was designed

to propel itself, but not for vast distances over such ground. Bigham would not be thwarted. His engineers designed a portable wooden roadway, and he hired a team of workers to set each section in place ahead of the iron wheels of the moving behemoth, then run back and pick up the next section as it passed. The steam boiler devoured water, it consumed wood, but Bigham had these supplies brought up in donkey carts and by porter, declaring he would be damned if he gave a pin for the expense. In such a way, a mile or so closer every day, they approached the site where he supposed lay the royal tombs.

The American, Wordsley concluded, was obsessed. There was no other name for this condition. What havoc might he not wreak, if someone were not there to prevent it?

Yet when it began, he was helpless to stop it. The steam boiler roared and shook and smoked and hissed, gears clanked and chains rattled: The boom lowered, the huge shovel bit into the desert floor and rose again with its iron maw full of dirt and sand and shattered stone and God-knew-what-else. Now and then the earth shook as the stubborn rock was dynamited into shards. "Ya Allah!" the few native donkey boys and servants exclaimed in terror and awe.

"Lord preserve us!" thought Wordsley.

And Bigham strode about the site, a general brandishing his parasol like a sword, directing operations.

Within two days, the excavator had unearthed a vast city of the dead that seemed to extend all the way to the hills. Mummies everywhere, lain in shallow graves, some with bags of golden statuettes, silver cups, beads of semiprecious stone, most with plugged-cent bits of this and that. These were not, certainly, the tombs of kings, although the names of kings—many kings and queens and princes and viziers and even the emperors of Rome—were graven upon so many of these objects. Hundreds of thousands, nay, a million graves lay open to the sky, now broken open and their mummified contents ground to dust under the iron wheels of the juggernaut.

"You must take care!" Wordsley protested, appalled to his heart. "Tell them to take care with that machine! This—is this a priceless find! So many mummies—my God, man, so many men here! There is not its like in all of Egypt—all the world! How did they all get here?"

But Bigham dismissed his concerns. "Trash! That's all this is, Wordsley, trash! A few scarabs, a few scrolls, a few broken jars, a bit of bone or human leather—who could care about truck like that when we can discover a real treasure! It's out there, I tell you! That's what these thieves were doing here. Somewhere there is the tomb of tombs! So great a find that a million men came here to their deaths for it. Ah, but none of them was an American, eh? Further into the hills, maybe. I will tear all of them down to bedrock and beyond if I must. But it's out there—the treasure of kings, Wordsley! I know it!" He slapped his chest where the pectoral lay. "This

Bigham, damn his greedy soul, must be right. The treasure, the treasure of kings, had to be close at hand.

Before long, Wordsley's tent was filled with scrolls. Even his cot was covered with them, so that he would have had to clear the space to sleep, if only he could spare the time for sleep.

He could have filled a dozen tents with scrolls and still not had room for them all. And he was not the only one to be gleaming from the tombs. Bigham's few Arab hirelings—all from Cairo—clanked as they walked, so laden were they with pilfered scarabs and seals. Even the Scottish engineers were filling their pockets during the hours of rest from attendance on their steam-powered charge and the careful laying of the dynamite sticks. Only Bigham ignored the fortune in antiquities that the shovel dug up from the sands with every bite, for his grandiose ambition would settle now for nothing less than the tombs of a hundred kings. Whatever he obliterated in his path, it was nothing to him.

Wordsley agonized to leave so many fragile papyri exposed to the hostile elements of the desert, but what else could he do? He was only one man! All he could do was search for the most promising, the rarest of the scrolls, and save those few, as many as he could. Yet as many as he found, so many more were being destroyed.

He thought perhaps of some way he might play hob with the infernal machine, but in truth he could discern no way this could be done that the engineers would not be able to fix within the course of a day. They were rough men, with permanently blackened faces from the smoke and smuts, but intelligent and ingenious craftsmen. A broken pivot or chain was nothing to them.

There had been no more of the mysterious deaths or disappearances in the night, such as had plagued Bigham's first expedition and driven off all the native workers. "Aren't you afraid?" he asked the donkey boys who trekked into the camp daily, carrying water. "The villagers of Tukh say this place is cursed. The Copts call this the Hill of Lilith. You Musselmans say it is the haunt of a *ghill*!"

At this, the Cairene boys and men made signs to avert evil, but one of them replied, "If there is a demon in this place, it does not dare approach the *makina*!"

Yet the *makina*, the diabolical creation, did have its weakness. It devoured not only water, vast amounts of it, which had to be carried in on donkey back, but fuel as well. And this was not a country with abundant supplies of wood or any other fuel.

One day, the flames diminished in the boiler. The needle on the steam gauge sank. The iron scoop hung motionless on its boom.

"I have to hire more men!" Bigham raged when the engineers explained the silence and activity of their mechanical charge. "More

Like an angel of death ... and was a messenger of god.



tells me so! Like a lodestone, Wordsley. Like a compass. It tells me I'm on the right bearing here, it tells me this is all going to be worth the effort."

Wordsley could only shake his head and mourn. He haunted the ruins of the ancient necropolis like a bereaved ghost, so overwhelmed by the scope of the find that he could not think of how to begin to salvage the least part of it. It would take an army, a veritable army of workers and scholars years to properly map and catalog the discoveries here. But already he was quite sure that the only reason so many would seek their burial here was a site of extraordinary holiness, a temple or tomb of a forgotten dynasty of god-kings. For that reason alone could so many have chosen to lay tombless, in meager graves, in this desolate waste for eternity.

donkeys! Damn these natives and their superstitions! Do you know what they're charging me for a load of wood?" He spun around, as if searching the sere and desolate terrain for a forest he could chop down to feed the steam boiler's insatiable appetite.

But this was the desert. There was nothing in sight as far as the horizon but rock and sand and despoiled graves.

"I'll show you what to burn!" he shouted. "I'll show you fuel!"

The engineers stared uncomprehendingly, but Wordsley had grasped Bigham's intent. "You can't! You couldn't do such a thing! It would be monstrous! Infamous!"

"I can't, can I? Why, I'll show you *can*!" The American seized up a mummy from the nearest heap of broken bone and cloth. "We'll just see how well these peasants burn!"

To Wordsley's inexpressible horror, he flung the mummy into the boiler's open maw, onto the seething bed of ashes, and instantly it burst into flame!

"There!" Bigham shouted triumphantly. "There's your fuel! Start stoking your boiler! Pass over that big fellow, I'll bet he'll burn as well as any split oak log! Let's build up a great head of steam, there!"

The mummies, as dried as they were and preserved by inflammable resins, were an inexhaustible source of fuel. Not only the human inhabitants of the graves, but mummified birds and beasts, all went into the fire. The head of steam built up again, the shovel rose and bit into the sand.

"That's it!" Bigham exclaimed. "That's the way! Throw in all of them, a million of them! Tear down those hills!"

"My Lord," she confessed on her knees before him, "I do not know what to do! The fiery Fiend—every day it comes closer to this place! It is surely spawned from *Hadet-Ketties*, the pit of fire where the Oppressor's enemies are consumed, for I have seen it myself, consuming the bodies of the dead! It bites through the sand and stone, it devours the hills! I cannot stop it! And I am so much afraid!"

Her Lord strained against his adamant bonds, laying within the Serpent's coiled embrace. "This is a creature of my brother that shakes my house of eternity! He is not willing that I survive, even in chains! See, the monster he first set here to devour me has failed, thanks only to you, my sister! Now he sends this thing with the fire of the Sun in its belly to tear away the rock from over my head! He will not be satisfied until he sees me burn!"

The Serpent of living stone watched and waited, coiled to strike, yet motionless while darkness held sway over the land. She shuddered as always when she met its malevolent eyes, remembering how many times its cruel fangs had seized her beloved Lord's limbs and tore them from his body, fulfilling the Oppressor's curse.

Yet she already had thwarted the Serpent's purpose and spared her brother unspeakable pain. Could she do less now? Faced with

She slipped into the tent behind him. The scribe bent over a low bed where scrolls were heaped, sorting through the papyri. She stepped forward. Suddenly aware, he turned.

His eyes became very wide, his body rigid. His mind roiled with lust, concupiscent shame, and burning terror. He could not move, though her smile beckoned him. Her cloak was flung back, and her flawless body gleamed like polished alabaster in the low lamplight.

"Read to me. Read to me and this shall be yours."

He needed no more urging than that, for his passions were now twice-stirred. He read, he spoke from memory, he uttered the spells guarded from her own eyes by a frieze of solar barques. For hours he went on, for hours she listened, committing to memory, rejoicing in the knowledge even as this scribe rejoiced.

All night she listened to his recitations, until the warning tints of approaching dawn came through the tent's cloth walls. Her hand sought his staff beneath his garments, her mouth pressed against his, and she took him into her, all of him. His husk fell away, his soul gestated within her.

As dawn rose in the sky outside, within the cavern that was her Lord's prison, she strained to give up the life she had just taken. The homunculus emerged from between her legs, in form the image of her Lord, but its soul had so lately been her ally. It stared at her—it thought and it feared and she averted her face. "Forgive me," she whispered, as the cruel stone head of the Serpent began to move. "But I grant you the boon for which you have been praying. Together, we shall thwart the purpose of your king!"

The spell she uttered was the one she had used now for thousands of years to turn the Serpent's punishment away from her Lord: *Let the judgment fall not upon him, but upon thee.*

But now she added these words, taken from the foreign scribe's treasure-trove of scrolls:

*Return thou now to the pit of fire,
Return now to the flame that spaturned thee.
For thine enemies are given to the fire,
In the fire thine enemies are consumed.
For thou art the Devourer.*



... a million graves lay ... open ground to dust under the iron

this new Fiend, could she let her courage fail her? Could she stand by and see her Lord exposed to the punishing rays of the Sun, his eternal enemy, or burned in the fiery pit?

"I will go forth again," she promised him. "Their king remains protected by the sign of the Oppressor and I cannot touch him, but I will find a way to stop this thing, I must."

For no one else could defend her Lord.

At night, the beast of fire slept, its belly no longer incandescent with heat, its roaring voice silenced. But the scent of myth still hung about it, the scent of the smoldering dead.

She had no spell to use against this enemy, it possessed no life that she could drain away. Its attendants, however—the men who fed it—against those she could act. Only the king was under the Oppressor's protection, not his servants.

One of them crossed the sands now, bearing an armload of scrolls, toward one of the small canopies where they slept. Another grave robber, she thought. Yet a sense of familiarity pricked her. This one, she had encountered before: The king's scribe, she recalled, the man who knew the old script. Yet the man's thoughts, when she met them, startled her: *He must be stopped! I have to find a way, before this is all destroyed!*

Here was an unexpected ally!

*Thou goest forth to meet thine enemies
And thine enemies shalt thou consume.
Thou shalt swallow them up entire,
Nor shall they rise again,
Nor any of their creation,
But they shall be utterly destroyed.*

The homunculus, animated by its own knowledge of the spells, let loose a shriek that echoed down the long, devouring throat of the Serpent. But this time, instead of returning to immobile stone as it had always done for two million sunrises, the Serpent's body rose higher. Its tongue flicked out, its head turned from side to side, seeking.

Then, slowly, the entire sinuous length of it uncoiled. With its scales rasping against the floor of the tomb, the Serpent of living stone slid out through the entrance of the cave, and so great was its girth that the rock split and chipped as it passed through.

The camp was stirring in the first full flush of dawn as men rose eager to take advantage of the cooler hours before the heat became too oppressive. It was one of the donkey boys who first saw the giant serpentine form approaching from out of the hills. At first, he thought it was some strange form of sand-slip, for the snake was the color of the stones of the hills, but then it raised its head, as if scenting for prey, and the boy screamed, "Te'aaban!"

For a long moment he stood as if paralyzed, but his scream alerted others and spurred them into motion, and when they too saw the monstrous form descending upon them, they fled, calling on God for deliverance from such manifest evil. The Scotsmen, busy stoking the boiler from a large stack of well-dried, quick-burning mummies, gaped at this sudden exodus of Bigham's native help. Their first thought was earthquake, not unknown in this region. But when they too understood at last that the roiling motion of rock and sand was the wake and the very body of the Serpent, they abandoned the boiler, the mummies, and the shovels and joined the native Arabs in their headlong flight to escape the monstrous apparition.

"Get out!" they shouted to Bigham as their employer came from his palatial tent, demanding loudly to know what in the devil was going on and why weren't they getting back to work now, damn them!

But words—there were no sufficient words, not in Arabic, not in English. One of the engineers mutely pointed behind him as he fled.

Then Bigham saw the Serpent. He blinked. To his eyes, it seemed as long as a freight train, and its girth so vast that it would have taken two men with linked arms to span it. He blinked again.

Phineas Bigham was a man of the world—this world, not the next. Before beginning his museum he had been familiar with the ways of theatrical performances and exhibitions, carnivals and side-shows, he knew the arts of capturing the imagination of the gullible, he knew how much was owing to the work of illusion. But he, Phineas Bigham, was not to be so easily deceived. So arming himself with common sense and rejecting the delusions of the credulous and superstitious, he brandished his parasol like a sword and advanced toward the apparition, shouting, "Humbbuggery! Hoodoo! You won't fool me—not Phineas Bigham!"

But when the Serpent paused, turning toward him, Bigham was considerably disquieted. Illusions, to his knowledge, did not interact with bystanders, not like this. When confronted, they vanished like smoke or became only queer patterns in tea leaves. They did not pause to reconsider their relationship with reality.

This apparition, this Serpent, however, did exactly that, and it came—it seemed to the stunned and disbelieving Bigham—to the rational conclusion that when something the size of it was con-

And so it did, it swallowed them whole: The great digging thing, the dead, and the fiery pit of iron.

Even in the distant cavern the sound of the explosion was audible, and the clatter of once-living stone shards as they fell down onto the desert like a fiery rain.

The Lady embraced her Lord in his chains, crying tears of joy, for the Fiend had been defeated at last, and it was utterly destroyed. After so many thousands of years, from this tormentor at least, he was now finally freed.

"You need go forth at night no longer, my sister, to seek lives. You need not suffer any longer in order to save me. We—you and I and the living—may we rest in peace."

"It was my duty and my joy to see you spared, beloved."

Yet she knew that she would continue to go forth and seek, for as many thousands of years as necessary. For in the mind of the foreign scribe there had been many images, and some of them were of other gods, who had once been bound and now were freed.

Perhaps she might yet one day find the spell to liberate her Lord, so that they might go forth together, into the night.

The Egyptian Museum in Philadelphia was a complete success, unquestionably the First Wonder of the New World. Men, women, and children from all across the United States came to see it and marvel at what American ingenuity had accomplished to bring such relics of Pharaoh to the City of Brotherly Love. It was fitting, they said, just fitting that the Sphinx and its riddles (they could not keep the Greek Sphinx separate from her Nile counterpart) be preserved in a land where cleverness and ingenuity flourished as they did.

It was a shame, however, about Mister Phineas Bigham. He had, it was clear, quite lost his mind in the desert; what a great and terrible sacrifice he had made for the edification of the American public. These days he wandered the museum's corridors leaning on a cane that had once been the stick of a parasol. It was now as inseparable from his as the golden amulet, souvenir of his Egyptian travels, that

and their mummified content wheels of the juggernaut.



fronted by something the size of he, that is to say, of a size to be swallowed, that he inevitably should be swallowed.

But it was the reek of hot stone, like lava gushing fresh from the interior of the Earth, that finally convinced Bigham the Serpent was truly what it seemed to be, and of the reality of his own impending demise. He ran, stumbled and fell to the sand, crawled like a brutish animal on his belly, but the Serpent's vast maw, gaping, surely leading straight to hell—closed on him, splintered his parasol, engulfed him to the shoulders.

In that instant of decapitation, it was as if a blazing light shone, as if he bore around his neck the blinding glory of the Sun itself, borne within a boat of ancient and holy design.

And the Serpent jerked back as if it were burned, shaking its vast head as Bigham sprawled helplessly on the sand. Its tongue flicked out to smell the air. It tasted incense and myrrh, it knew the scent of mummified bodies, burning. It saw the fire in the iron boiler, already red-hot, a pit of fire to consume the dead, yet not hotter than the golden barque of the Sun, its god and master.

But the words of the spell bound it now:

For thou art the Devourer.

Thou goest forth to meet thine enemies

And thine enemies shalt thou consume.

Thou shalt swallow them up entire,

he kept hidden beneath his vest. He was at once a living monument to what Americans could accomplish abroad and to why they should perhaps not go abroad at all.

For he was, quite simply, tetchéd. Had he gone to war, been shattered at Gettysburg, they might have understood. But he had only gone into the desert and come home with mummies and Sphinxes and pyramids and other such truck, but most remarkably the shards of stone which, once reassembled by skilled stonemasons, took the form of a gigantic serpent, coiled to strike.

It was, they all agreed, quite a remarkable thing he had found in the sand, nearly as remarkable as the bodiless Sphinx. It was so unnecessary (and in fact so sad) that he should feel compelled to embroider a tale—and a tall tale at that—around them. And insist on its truth, no matter how the experts scoffed and ridiculed his greatest discovery. But children, anyway, adored the story he told as he haunted his museum's halls. And if they were very good children and listened attentively, he might even open his vest and show them the golden amulet he kept there on a chain around his neck, bearing the image of the barque of the Sun. For this, he told them, was the only thing that had saved him on the day that the great Serpent swallowed whole the famous Otis Shovel and its boiler which, stoked to the bursting point with mummies saturated in combustible resins, had just built up such a very great head of steam. ♦

How KONTI

By Richard Parks, Illustration by Michael Gibbs

IT IS SAID, AND IT IS SO, that the gods were very busy in that time of the first Creation. All were bearing worlds from their loins, creating them fully grown from nothing, or rolling them up from the Sacred Dung of the Heavens or whatever vile substances the priests could later imagine—and they could imagine things surpassingly vile indeed, truth be told.

None of this mattered to Konti. He was brown and very small, the weakest deity in the Heavens. Hardly a god at all, to tell the truth twice in the same tale. He had his place among them and, if no one had questioned that, it was only because to be in the Heavens at all probably meant you must have had a place there, somewhere. Then again, perhaps it just meant that the First Gods were too busy creating to watch the gate. Either way, Konti watched the stronger gods doing all the things he could not do, and he was not happy. Konti was a clear-minded sort, god or no; he already knew his limitations.

Now he wanted to discover his potential. So he thought about this, for that was all he could do about it, as he watched the mighty sky god Pondadin work at creation, shaping clouds with wind and lightning.

Scrounged the WORLD

The best quilts are composed of the most scraps.
Perhaps the same is true of worlds.



"I want my own world," Konti said.

"Then you must make it. That is the Law of Heaven," Pondadin said to him, for despite his bluster he was a kindly god, and as close to a friend as Konti had.

"The Law of Heaven? Who made such a thing that even the gods must bow to it?"

Pondadin frowned, and thunder rumbled. "I don't know," he said. "I only know that it is." His tone clearly said that he'd exhausted both knowledge and interest in the subject. "So. What power will you use to create a world?"

"I have none that I know of," Konti said, looking melancholy. "All I have is this sack that I found." He held it up for Pondadin to see, and it was a pitiful-looking thing of shadow and wish, and probably not so much lost as discarded as useless by some better-equipped deity.

"For a god that is a problem indeed," Pondadin rested in his labors for a moment, scratching a spot on his curling beard with a fork of lightning. "I'd help you, but it will be all I can do to finish the work I have already begun. Still..." Pondadin scratched another acre of beard, pondering. "My own world is full of clouds and sky, and to my mind no proper world is without them. I will not miss a bit of either. Do you want them?"

Konti lost a bit of his melancholy at Pondadin's kind offer. "It's a start. Thank you." He held up his sack and Pondadin pushed the cloud and a bit of blue sky inside with a gust of wind. To Konti's relief they all fit in his sack very well indeed, even the gust of wind that was more afterthought than gift. He bid Pondadin a good creation and strode off with the sack of cloud, sky, and wind on his back.

Konti walked for some time, then stopped to rest on a bare patch of Heaven. Those were getting rarer, as more and more of the firmament was given over to various new Creations. He looked at a few of them from his vantage point on the firmament, and soon thought of another reason for wanting his own world: He couldn't imagine living in any of the others at all. He tried. He admired Pondadin's majestic skyworld of billowing clouds and brooding storms, but it was wet a good bit of the time and there just wasn't a good place to sit down anywhere. Another world was all bare mountains and plains of dark earth. Nice for sitting, and dry, but certainly nothing to look at. Konti considered all the fledgling worlds he could see and found serious fault with every single one. "Why should all the worlds be so limited?"

There was no answer, of course. There was no one to ask, so far as Konti knew. There were rumors of a being called the Transcendent One whose plane of existence was beyond even that of the gods, but none in the Heavens actually claimed to have seen such a one. Perhaps that was the one who made the Laws of Heaven. Perhaps it didn't matter. Konti had to deal with the Heavens as they were, and how they got that way was of lesser concern than his current predicament.

"Limited or not, at this rate the created worlds will fill up the firmament soon and there won't be room for another world. Even a small one. I can't dally here."

Konti looked around, and considered for a while. "I know from Pondadin's skyworld that a creation with no place to sit and rest simply won't do. What's needed is earth, and since I can't make it..."

"Steal it."

Konti looked around again, saw nothing among the swirling chaos of new creation. "Who said that?"

"You did." The voice came again, closer. It was a voice close to laughter, Konti thought, but not so pleasant as it should have been, for all that.

"No, I did not say such a thing, I would remember. Show yourself!"

"Well then, doubtless you were thinking it. I can never remember which."

A figure appeared out of the Haze of Creation. He was tall and handsome, except when he was short and handsome and excepting further when he was tall and beautiful and short and beautiful and probably not a "he" at all.

"What are you? You keep changing."

"I am Asakan. And thank you."

Konti blinked. "Did I compliment you? I didn't intend to. Nor to insult you, for that matter. I don't know you."

"I am Asakan. It's true I do keep changing, and I took your observation as a compliment, of course. How dull to be the same thing all the time!"

"Very well, then. What do you want from me?"

"I want to help you. Why else should I give you such good advice?"

Konti put his sack over his shoulder. "I don't know. There may be other reasons." He started to walk away, but there was Asakan beside him.

"What haste, friend Konti?"

"I am not your friend; we just met. And I am in haste because Creation is proceeding without me."

Asakan, looking more male than anything else at the moment, shook his head. "Run all you like. It won't help. You need earth underfoot, since the Firmament cannot be part of any world. To get earth, you must get it from the goddess Susaka, for only she can make it. Why would she give her precious earth to a pitiful little godlet like you?"

"I don't know, but there must be another way," Konti didn't know of one, but Asakan's idea made him wince, as if he'd stepped in something unpleasant.

"Why 'must' there be?" Asakan asked. "And even if there is, what makes you think you can find it?" The god vanished, leaving Konti alone to ponder that question for some time.

STEALING A BIT OF SUSAKA'S EARTH WOULD BE easy enough, Konti decided. There were so many places to walk and hide in Susaka's creation. It's true earth was dry and cracked, and the sky was nothing to remark upon, nor was there much in the way of shade or refreshment. Still, there was a stark beauty to it that Konti admired as he wandered past bare mountains and sandy valleys, trying to decide what to do.

"What if Asakan is right?" he asked himself, and he feared to learn the answer. Feeling more than a little ashamed of himself, Konti pulled the bag from over his shoulder and bent down to scoop up some of the precious earth.

Boom!

Konti immediately crouched behind a rock, afraid and ashamed that Susaka had found him out. After a few moments and nothing else had happened, Konti peered out of his hiding place.

BOOM!

The same sound, as loud as Pondadin's majestic thunder but without the same roll and crash at the end. His curiosity quite overwhelming his need, Konti dropped the bit of dry earth he'd taken, put his sack back over his shoulder, and went to find the source of the noise.

Susaka was creating a mountain. She stood with her feet planted widely apart, her strong arms lifted in a gesture that was at once command and enticement. The earth before her responded, breaking its crust with the booming sounds Konti had heard earlier. The mountain spired ever higher, till Konti had to tilt his head far back to see the top of it.

"Marvelous," he said aloud, "but it looks like a great deal of work."

Susaka lowered her arms and turned to look at him. It was the first time Konti had seen her face. He thought it rather pleasant, though why it was pleasing to him was something he could not have put into words. She was solidly built as befit the nature of her dominion, with broad strong hips and wide shoulders; her hair was like a spray of melted copper.

"Konti," she said, looking him up and down, "I've seen you before. Why are you here?"

"I came looking for some dirt," he said, since honesty was usually his first impulse.

"Then you've found it. Admire it quietly and be on your way. I'm busy." Her voice had the same dry quality as her Creation.

That seemed to be the limit of her generosity, though Konti wondered if perhaps Susaka's ill humor might have had more significance. "I am sorry to disturb you, but you seem tired. And something more than tired. Is something missing?"

Susaka had turned back to her birthing mountain, but Konti's words made her look at him again. "Are you saying there is a flaw in my creation, little god?"

Konti hardly thought that last bit fair, since she was, if anything, a little shorter than he was. "I'm saying there's something missing. Something your world does not give you. Water, for one."

She looked puzzled, and when she spoke again there was a softness to her voice that had been missing before. "My throat is dry and my lips burn me, if that is what you mean. Will this 'water' ease that pain? What is it?"

"Something I found in Pondadin's Creation. A wonderful place, though of course he has nothing like your mountains. Still I found the water that falls from his clouds quite refreshing when my own throat felt dry."

She shook her head. "Perhaps you're telling the truth, but I have no time to seek Pondadin out nor could I give him any reason to spare part of his creation."

"I have the makings of Pondadin's clouds with me," Konti said, patting the sack over his shoulder. "And you certainly have something I would want in return."

"My precious earth?"

"Only a little, as I have only a bit of Pondadin's clouds and cannot give them all to you. If you honestly think the water is not what I have said, then I will ask nothing."

Susaka had to admit that this sounded fair enough. Konti very carefully opened his sack, taking care not to let the wind out at all, and set loose a bit of cloud. It boiled and grew overhead just as Konti had seen the clouds do for Pondadin, and in a few moments the cloud went black and then rain fell on Susaka's dry Creation. Susaka caught the rain in her cupped hands and drank. She shivered as cold rivulets caressed her body and puddled at her feet. Even more marvelous than the rain itself was the effect it had on Susaka's earth, forming soft mud that squished between her toes and eased her tired feet. All too soon, though, the rain ended and the spent cloud boiled away into nothing.

"Well?" Konti asked.

"That was very pleasant," Susaka admitted. "Different. I don't think I would like it all the time, but for a bit.... Well, enough. You may have some of my earth in exchange."

Konti quickly took as much as he thought prudent and tucked it away in his sack between the wind and the rest of Pondadin's clouds. He was careful, too, to include a bit of the mud created by the rain cloud. It felt malleable in his hands, full of possibilities. Susaka apparently felt so, too. When Konti left her she was taking it into her hands and seeing what shapes she could make there. The mountain was all but forgotten.

Asakan was waiting for him outside of Susaka's Creation. He glanced at Konti's filling sack. "You got it, didn't you? You are more clever than I thought."

Konti frowned. "You're a god. Why are you following me instead of working on your own Creation?"

Asakan grinned. "Why do you think I am not?" he asked, and then vanished again without waiting for an answer.

Konti sighed. Asakan was a strange sort, but Konti didn't have time for riddles. He took stock of the pieces he had collected, and considered. There was earth to sit on and clouds and rain for thirst, and that was very promising. Yet Konti remembered how hot and dry it had been in Susaka's world, and how damp and cold in Pondadin's. It was closer to balance now, but still he knew something was missing.

"Some shade from the Sun or shelter from the wind would be a good thing, and I'm not sure a hole in the dirt would be enough. What else might serve?" Konti hoisted his sack again and set out among the growing Creations to try to find out.

Konti found what he was looking for in a Creation being formed by an obscure fertility god named Verdku. Such was Verdku's power that he brought forth green growing things from the air itself, taking space in the firmament but not really of it. Konti watched, fascinated.

"That is a marvelous talent."

Verdku frowned. His thoughts and speech were as slow as the roots that grew out of one of his trees, and just as single-minded. "They grow," he said, "and then they die."

That part was true enough. Verdku brought forth a great tangle of trees and tangling vines with little more than his desire to create them. They hung, green and alive and splendid for several hours over Verdku's Creation, then they slowly withered, shed leaves, and died. Verdku banished them with a thought and then created them all over again. And again. "They grow," he repeated, "and then they die."

Konti nodded in sympathy. "It must be a great loss to you, to lose all your work over and over again. Perhaps I have something that can help you."

Verdku frowned again, his face as dark and furrowed as the bark of one of his great oaks. "Help. Me? How?"

"A time or two now I've come across problems with various Creations, and in all cases the thing needed is a thing missing, something found in another Creation altogether. I happen to have a few pieces of various Creations with me and with your consent I'll try them."

Verdku nodded, and Konti opened his sack. "Let's see. I've still a bit of cloud and sky from Pondadin. Let me try a little of that." Konti released a piece of cloud into Verdku's creation. In no time at all he had a small storm raining on Verdku's trees, and for a moment Konti thought he had the answer: Browning leaves turned to green again and withering blossoms opened anew. That lasted longer than before, but still not for so long as one might wish. Soon all was dead and brown once more.

Konti considered. "That was good, but not enough. Perhaps the water goes away too quickly." Konti brought another cloud forth, but this time he was careful to fix some of Susaka's earth to the various roots to hold the water in, and this time the green remained for a good long time. Verdku was impressed.

"Might I?" he asked.

"Certainly," Konti said. "But I've not so much that I can spare more than a little. In return I would like a few of your marvelous growing things."

"They grow," Verdku said. He looked at the remaining bits of green, so much in contrast with the rest of his Creation, then he looked at Konti. "They live. Done."

Konti took a few grasses and flowers and one small tree, careful to fix these into Susaka's earth kissed with a little water from Pondadin's clouds. There wasn't so much left of either as there had been, but it would have to do. Konti put the bag over his shoulder again and left Verdku admiring the green spots in his Creation.

Again, outside on the firmament, Asakan was waiting.

"You're quite clever," he said, "for such an insignificant godling."

Konti shrugged. "Since I cannot be great among the gods it remains that I must be content with what I am," Konti said. "Now please go away. I have a world to create."

Asakan nodded quickly affably. "I'll leave you to it, then." True to his word, he vanished.

A strange sort, Konti thought again, but that was all the thought he could spare for the subject. There was no time to ponder. There was no time for hardly anything. Konti quickly found the last undclaimed patch of the firmament, a spot only a few times wider than Konti was tall. There he emptied his sack and began to assemble his pieces of borrowed creation like a puzzle box. From his experiences in the other Creations he had a pretty decent idea of how the pieces needed to relate, but there was still room for choices and changes. He started with water one time but that made the earth wash away, and not all the green things floated as well as he thought. He started over with Susaka's earth for a base and that worked much better. *Earth below, sky above.*

It was a start, and that's all Konti needed. In almost no time at all he was done, and as the last piece of Heaven's firmament became his, so did all of Creation come to a halt. The gods stepped outside into whatever places they could find and admired their handiwork.

"Majestic," said Pondadin.

"Massive," said Susaka.

"Green." For a while," said Verdiku.

Of all the gods, they were the only ones even slightly pleased. The rest just stared at their Creations with a sort of resigned disappointment, for what they had created was no more or less than they had to create, as dictated by their natures.

And yet ...

Lealys, a goddess of love and procreation, was left with a Creation of nothing but sighs and longing. Golgondan, a god of competition and strife, got pretty much the same result as Lealys, even if he approached the whole concept from another direction entirely.

"What good is love," Lealys said, "if there is no one to love?"

"What use strife," grumbled Golgondan, "if there is nothing to oppose?"

Various other deities chimed in their disappointment until the din of whining in Heaven threatened to overwhelm even Pondadin's majestic rolling thunder. Asakan strolled through the crowd of complaining, bickering gods. He was whistling. One by one the other gods stopped their complaining long enough to look at Asakan and wonder what he had to be so happy about. After all, he had no Creation at all. Golgondan said as much.

"I have no need of one," said Asakan. "I'll just live on Konti's. It's better than any of yours."

This was of course followed by even more noise. Nonsense! Absurd! How could that flea of a godling make anything to compare with our grand Creations? Asakan just smiled.

"Come and see," he said.

Still bickering and complaining, the gods fell into line behind Asakan and he led them to the small patch of the firmament where Konti stood gazing at his Creation and smiling a smile of pure content.

The gods fell silent.

Konti's world was not majestic, or loud, or massive, or full of either strife or longing, but none of that seemed to matter just then. All the gods looked at Konti's jewel of a Creation. Susaka's earth was divided by rivers and blue oceans and clothed in Verdiku's green. Above all, Pondadin's swirling clouds flowed by.

Susaka spoke first. "Even though my earth is mostly covered, I must admit the effect is rather lovely."

"But it's so small," Golgondan said.

Konti shrugged. "I worked with what I had. I am satisfied."

The other gods looked at each other, then away, then at nothing. The swollen Creations, the Firmament, or what was left of it, anything but Konti's perfect Creation. Borrowed, yes, but no less perfect. None of them, not one could say what Konti had just said, and know it for truth.

"But it's so small," Golgondan repeated, for it was his nature to find fault. "What could you do with it?"

"I shall live on it, of course," Konti said. "As I am a small creature, it is quite large enough for me."

Pondadin, silent until now, spoke up. "I want to live there, too."

Konti nodded. "You're quite welcome, friend Pondadin, though it will be cramped."

"If Pondadin is coming, so am I," Golgondan announced, and several more of the gods chimed in.

"Oh dear," Konti said. "You cannot. There's not enough room—"

"What friend Konti *meant* to say," Asakan interrupted quickly, "is that you're all welcome to come, and bring your Creations with you."

"That's not" Konti never finished. One by one the other gods hurried away and returned bearing the entirety of their Creations with them and, though Konti had not thought it possible, his own Creation grew to receive them. First earth, then green growing

things, then clouds and water. Golgondan and Lealys were last, bringing desires and longing into what was now a very large Creation indeed. Konti and Asakan followed when all was done.

Konti looked around. "Where are the others?"

Asakan smiled. "All around us, friend Konti. Don't you see them?"

Konti looked at the earth beneath his feet, and the sky above, and all the trees and grass and flowers, and had to admit that he did, everywhere he looked.

"It's fine to have them near, but now I think that perhaps something is missing after all."

"Longing has entered Creation, Konti. How can it be otherwise now?"

Konti looked around. "I don't understand, Asakan. I forgive you for the trick you played on me, since this world is very grand, but now I just see the others reflected by their natures, all around me. Yet I am not changed, nor are you. Are we not gods?"

"I am here because I am always here."

"I don't understand," Konti said.

"I know. As for you, if you are a god, tell me why you were able to create what none of the others, with their powerful yet limited natures, could? Perhaps you are something else, something with even more potential. Sort it out. You have time."

"Perhaps, but where should I start?"

Asakan looked thoughtful. "Susaka found a very interesting property in that 'mud' substance you made for her. Her handiwork is down by that river. You might start there. Until then...." Asakan leaned forward and kissed Konti full on the mouth.

Konti blinked. "What was that?"

Asakan smiled. "A gift."

Konti considered this. "What shall I do with it?"

"When the time comes, you'll know."

Konti watched Asakan walk away. He looked different, somehow. For a moment, it seemed, Konti could have sworn that Asakan looked like every god he had ever met in the Heavens, all at the same time, all their aspects taken into one. It was a silly notion, and Konti had to smile.

He waited until Asakan disappeared and then walked down to the river, and there he found something very interesting indeed. Susaka had shaped wet clay into a likeness very much like herself. Konti thought the likeness very beautiful and, remembering Asakan's gift and moved by the longing now filling Creation, he leaned forward and kissed the image's cold lips. Immediately his breath was taken into the clay and in a moment it changed. It moved. And it was not clay at all.

"Hello," she said.

I'll sort this out too, Konti thought, though he had the feeling it would take a very long time indeed. ♦

Various deities
chimed in until
the din of
whining
threatened to
overwhelm
even
Pondadin's
majestic
rolling thunder.

THERE IS A PLACE THAT SHOULDN'T EXIST.
BUT DOES.



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john jude palencar:

CAUGHT BETWEEN

BY KAREN HABER



WORLDS



It is midnight in a quiet Ohio college town. Most of the citizens slumber innocently, unaware of what is taking place nearby, under the eaves of a Victorian home on a quiet street. Indeed, children and mother sleep soundly in the Stygian darkness, in that very building where unspeakable evils are being suggested, stroke by stroke, on canvas.

John Jude Palencar labors on through the crepuscular gloom like a member of some terrible Lovecraftian nocturnal cult. Only when the first rays of the morning Sun threaten to dispel the night's dark dominion does he crawl like a vampire to his lair and rest.

Left behind him on the easel are the haunting results of his nightly struggles with the muse: A locomotive bearing a blind skull-like face and gaping maw, a desert sky in which the malevolent leering Moon wears a cowboy hat, a lone blue eyeball perching upon a shelf, a floating sleeper surrounded by screaming phantasms. The products of his own subconscious?

JOHN JUDE PALENCAR LABORS ON THROUGH A MEMBER OF SOME



THE CREPUSCULAR BLOOM LIKE TERRIBLE LOVECRAFTIAN NOCTURNAL CULT.



Palencar's art has a subtle and terrifying power. There are no bloodsucking babes in leather in his oeuvre, although he is meticulous about rendering anatomy, taking photos and even plaster casts of his models.

His work suggests rather than shouts. Rendered in oils and acrylic paints in thin layers and subdued tones, the images are rich and powerful. Elegant horror may sound like an oxymoron, but that's the best description of what Palencar does. His work sneaks up on you, whispers something peculiar in your ear, and leaves you with an uneasy feeling in the pit of your stomach.



PRECIOUS BEACON: One of Palencar's classic women graces the cover of *Jovah's Angel*, from the trilogy by Sharon Shinn. **INSET:** *Blood Debt*, for the book by Tanya Huff, won the Gold Book Award from Spectrum.

THIS BEACON, LEFT: The influence of Hieronymus Bosch is evident in this painting portraying the "panic of a new millennium." **ABOVE:** The cover of Octavia Butler's novel, *Wildseed*.

The artist himself is hideously cheerful about it all. "Horror is always sort of fun," he says. "I don't think of myself as a genre artist, although I do paint Fantasy and Science Fiction, among other things. Being labeled as an illustrator can be limiting. I want to do more."

Palencar aims to evoke ambiguity and uneasiness. "I enjoy taking the Hitchcock approach: You know that there's something on the other side of the door that's after you, but you don't know what it is."

"I like to render a horrific image in a very delicate way. The contradictory approach is very interesting to me as an artist. For one cover I had in mind the delicacy and horror of Goya's 'Saturn Devouring His Children,' and for another, Michelangelo's depiction of sibyls in the Sistine Chapel. 'I'm kind of caught between worlds. Between horror and fine arts. I love doing anything that has a surrealist edge. I want to do timeless stuff, work that will hold up years from now, that can stand on its own as fine art.'"

Palencar has painted covers for just about any publisher you care to name, including Avon, Bantam, Time-Life, TOR, Viking Penguin, Warner Books, and Random House. Stephen King liked Palencar's covers for his Regulator books so much that he has several Palencar originals in his private collection.

The artist's work has appeared in *Heavy Metal*, *Smithsonian*, and *Playboy* magazines, to name a few, and is in numerous private and public collections, including the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Columbus Museum of Art. Glimmer Graphics is planning a limited edition of Palencar's paintings. Among the numerous awards he's received are the 1999 Chesley Award from ASFA for the best paperback cover and silver medals from the Society of Illustrators in New York.

He's been "artist-in-residence" at the Cill Rialaig Project in County Kerry, Ireland, and is slated for a one-man show at Origin Gallery in Dublin later this year. International interest in Palencar's work continues to heat up: In addition to Ireland, he's received calls from Spain, Australia, and Poland.

What makes his paintings so interesting? Perhaps it's his use of challenging images combined with a limited palette.

"I've always been tonally driven," he says. "If I used more color, I'd want to change my technique to be more impressionistic. And there's actually more color in my work than meets the eye. If you put a black-and-white reproduction next to one of my paintings, you'd see the difference immediately."

He admits that his limited color scheme may be deadline-driven, but, deadlines aside, "I think grays are neat."

He often employs a triad color scheme, for example, orange/purple/green, to achieve his subtle effects. "I overlay colors with tiny strokes. It's an egg tempera technique that I've adapted to oils and acrylics."

Palencar isn't a fan of digital work. "It seems to be producing a dozen derivative styles. The novelty is going to wear off. It's just going to become another tool."

"I prefer paint because you have layers and texture and tactile sense. The digital stuff is so flat. With paint your eye still senses the layers, no matter how thin, and travels into them."



Although Palencar's work looks seamless and almost perfect, he says that he likes to put an element into each painting that makes it imperfect and challenging. "I want some-

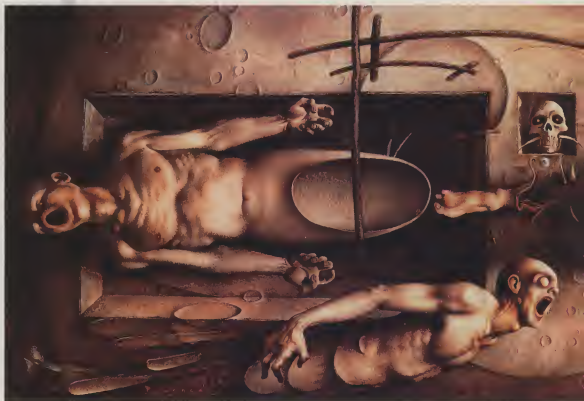
thing in there to be a little bit askew, an anomaly. It spurs me on as I paint and makes things happen. It's a catalyst for me. And maybe for the viewer as well.

"I like to pare the image down to a figure and a landscape. I want something to stand apart, become an icon."

"I get a lot of inspiration from the old masters, and I'm kind of jealous of them. They were the first. Da Vinci was the first to cut a skull apart. It's frustrating that, visually, everything has really already been done. Contemporary artists are forced to invent visual dialects now."

While some artists cleave to a manuscript when painting a cover, Palencar prefers to use stories as a jumping-off point. His wife, Lee, a writer and speed reader, often reads manuscripts for him and summarizes the essential story points. "Otherwise," he says, "I can learn too much about the book. I like to run in the opposite direction. I like to just find out what the basic idea is and then move away from it in order to

create a symbolic representation of what's in the book. I don't want to paint just a literal representation. There's no room for imagination that way."



Palencar's obsessive painting drive developed early. In high school, he would tell his friends that he couldn't meet them because he was too busy working on a painting. He went on to hone his obsessive skills at the Columbus College of Art and Design and the Illustrator's Workshop in Paris. After that he put in a stint in the trenches of greeting card illustration and advertising design before striking out on his own.

"You get a lot of Frazetta and Rackham clones in the book business. They have to make extremely literal statements. It's because of marketing. But that's not what I want to do.

"I prefer to create a sense of quiet menace. To sneak up on the viewer. To do the unexpected."

As illustration, he cites a favorite scene from the movie *Animal House*: "There's a scene that kind of sums up what I'm aiming for. John Belushi sees a guy singing a nauseatingly sweet ballad. He smiles at the guy, grabs the guitar, and smashes it to pieces.

"Sometimes I just want to smash the guitar." 🍌



OPPOSITE TOP: A "skull train" goes screaming down the tracks in Stephen King's *The Waste Land*.

LEFT: Palencar captures the madness of H.P. Lovecraft's *Cthulhu Mythos* with ease.

ABOVE: From a series of personal works by Palencar, *Bird Shrine* is the artist's emotional representation of misguided faith.



*I opened my eyes, and, for a moment,
almost believed that I saw her face....But when
I looked more keenly, I saw only twigs and leaves, and
the infinite sky, in tiny spots, gazing through between.
Yet I know that good is coming to me—that good is always
coming; though few have at all times the simplicity and the
courage to believe it.*

—George MacDonald

*A proud
workman
respects his
tools, and a
good tool
respects the
workman.*

A young man once found himself at nightfall deep in a forest, far from inn or village. As the sky darkened, Anodos (for so he was called) found a safe, dry place in a cove of laurel bushes. Pulling his cloak around him, he laid his head on a drift of leaves, and soon fell asleep.

Before long, the Moon rose beyond the grasp of the tallest trees, and Anodos had a dream. He thought he lay in the softest of feather beds, and that a woman in a green gown, with hair like brown amber, came and sat beside him, and offered him red wine in a goblet of alabaster. But when he had taken a single sip, the goblet seemed to disappear.

"When the Sun rises," the woman told him, "take what you find under your pillow, and keep it with you for good. Three ways you may use it and three ways you may not, and one way it will use you."

"How?" he asked then. "How may I use it and how not, and how will I be used?"

But the woman had disappeared just as the wine had. The young man slept deeply through the rest of the night, and no other dreams came near his resting place.

In the morning, the wood was filled with mist, and the Sun rose white as the Moon. Anodos had eaten a single mouthful of bread to break his fast when he remembered his dream. There was no pillow, of course, but the woman's voice was still so real in his memory he pushed aside the leaves he had lain on, to see if there chanced to be anything there.

All he found, though, was a broken stick of laurel wood, twisted and weathered—not such a treasure as the dream had somehow led him to expect. Still, it was a solid staff, smooth and unsplintered, and just fitted to his hand; so he thrust it through the strap of his pack and carried it when he set off from the place.

He had tramped along the dim forest road for many hours, then, the quiet old trees gave way to smaller, newer woods, and the woods gave way to rocky pastures, and the pastures to well-kept fields, and finally, ahead of him, he saw the walls and open gateway and the rooftops of a town.

Within the town walls, the noise and bustle soon persuaded him he'd been alone a long time. When he came to a high, windowless house, he did not hesitate, but spoke to a fellow standing near him hawking tinware in the street.

"What is this place?" he asked. "Where is its door, and why has it no window?"

The man selling tin shrugged.

"They say," he replied, "there is a prisoner inside who cannot come out until someone fetches the cat from the House Up On the Mountain."

"But is there no one who will do such a small thing, to set free this unfortunate prisoner?"

LAUREL WOOD

BY ANNA KIRWAN
Illustration by Steven Adler

The fellow shrugged again.

"They say whoever goes up to the House cannot utter a word all the time he's about the errand."

"And, is that so hard for townsmen, going without speaking?" laughed Anodos. "I've just been five days in the forest, and spoke no word, nor missed the speaking."

"Then maybe you should try your luck at the task," the tin peddler said, "for they say there's a rich reward for the one who manages it."

Now, Anodos could scarcely credit a story so strange. But he had a bowl of soup nearby in the marketplace, and mentioned the windowless house to one or two other folk he talked with there. Each inquiry brought up the same account, but no one could say why it had not been done yet.

Well, having little enough in his wallet, Anodos thought he would give it a try. With his pack on his back, still carrying the laurel wood staff, he set off for the House Up On the Mountain.

The path he followed cut across pastures and began soon to climb toward the rocky heights, and the higher the path went, the harder time Anodos had keeping his footing. Before long, it was almost as if the stone path were turning to glass. In one place, he fell to his knees; around another bend, he tumbled the whole length of a horse and cart. Still, he was loath to give up what he'd set off to do.

All at once, he remembered the laurel stick, and how the woman of his dream had told him, *Three ways you may use it.*

Well, here's a way I may find it useful, he thought (but he was careful not to say it aloud): I will use it as a walking staff, and lean on it to help me keep my feet on the ground.

Thinking thus, he drew the laurel stick from the strap of his pack. And though the stick was dry and twisted, and jagged as a bolt of lightning, his hand was just fitted to holding it. When he set it in a cleft of slippery stone, he found he could manage the steep path so much the easier, that soon he was on his way up the mountain once more.

As he climbed higher, the trees and bushes grew sparser. After a while, it seemed to him that although it was by this time late afternoon, almost nightfall, the light around him was growing warmer and brighter. At last, he came to a clearing high up on a western spur of the mountain.

In the clearing stood the strangest house Anodos had ever seen; and when he saw it, he understood why the air had grown so warm and bright.

The house in the clearing was made all of mirrors, faceted so cleverly that the walls reflected the descending Sun's flaming light. It was a most imposing sight, yet Anodos did not forget himself and cry out at any word of surprise; but, one hand clasped tight around the laurel stick, he cast the other across his eyes to shield them from the glare.

Gradually, though, he grew used to the brilliance, and began to think of his task. Where was the cat that lived in this strange dwelling? And how could he borrow it, or even lure it away, if he could neither speak to the house's owner nor call the cat to him from wherever it was hunting or napping?

Now, it happened just then, he heard a rustling in the low, dry grass that was all that grew on the mountaintop, and when he turned to the sound, he saw a small, black rat. It occurred to him just like that, that if he could get close and step lively, he might be lucky enough to strike the rat. Then he could use it as bait to lure forth the cat, and never need any other way to bring it down to the town.

So, slowly, he began to move toward the little animal, which crouched there unconcerned, nibbling at an ear of wheat.

Anodos had taken only a step or two, though, when he remembered the woman in green, and the pure white goblet. And he grew unwilling to use the laurel staff to kill the rat. Had she not said, *Three ways you may not use it?* It seemed to him, now, a poor way to employ the staff that reminded him of his dream, and he resolved that he would do better to wait and consider other plans, before resorting to such a deed.

Just then, the rat saw him and scurried off. And that was that.

Anodos could see no door on the side of the house he faced, so he set about walking around the whole house. When he'd gone all

around, though, he'd still found only mirrored walls, and a single plain glass window. There was no bell or knocker to be seen, and no sign of any living there.

Yet he would not go away without the cat, having come so far and having imagined, all the time he was climbing, such comforts as the reward would provide. He had to find a way into the House Up On the Mountain.

It occurred to him, then, that he might beat the laurel stick against the mirrored walls, and so, break into the strange house and find the creature he'd come for. He still might even make his way back down to the town before the Moon was halfway across the night.

So he raised the staff in both hands and swung it over his shoulder, ready to shatter the window.

But the Sun's red light was staining the whole clearing the color of claret, and that reminded him of the wine he'd tasted in his dream. He thought how he'd pulled the laurel stick from the heap of leaves he'd rested on, and how smooth it had at once felt in his hand; and he found he was reluctant to scar it, breaking into this mysterious house.

Just then, before him, a panel of mirror slid sideways to reveal a gaping doorway tall as an oak of 21 years. In the doorway loomed a giantess, with an apron as wide as the bishop's dining table, and sharp teeth as long as the young man's hand.

"Well," she roared, "who trespasses around my husband's House? Speak now, or regret your silence!"

But, frightened though he was, Anodos remembered he'd been told he must not utter a word. What was he to do? Speak as she bid him, and risk penalty? Or offend her by not answering?

Then he thought of his dream: *Three ways you may use it*, the woman in green had said; and, at once, he had an idea. Using the tip of the laurel stick, he wrote in the dust at his feet, WILL YOU SEND OUT YOUR CAT, PLEASE?

The giantess roared again, but this time, she roared with laughter.

"Send him out, is it? Nay, you've come too late in the day for that! But you may come and take him, if you can, my bold fellow." Then she stooped over and scooped Anodos up and lifted him inside the House Up On the Mountain.

Now, inside, that House was as strange as outside, and four times again as wonderful. For Anodos looked around him and discovered that all the enormous chairs and tables, all the cabinets and cupboards, all the shelves and cubbyholes seemed to be heaped with treasure. Not only did the enormous room glint and glow with new and old platters and tankards and crowns of gold; not only did jewels filled with fire and necklaces the size of anchor chains clutter the corners; but everywhere he looked, he seemed to catch glimpses of pretty things he'd seen somewhere before in his life and wanted.

Surely, that was his uncle's ring he'd loved to play with when he was just a babe on the old man's knee. His uncle had been lost at sea; yet here was the ring, as shiny as when the child he'd been had last seen it.

And surely, hanging on the back of the giant's chair, that was the duke's plume-crested helmet that he wore years ago when he rode on pilgrimage past the cottage where Anodos spent his boyhood.

Why, even the gilded weathercock from the king's summer palace, which Anodos had seen only from far away, was here, now, on a table close at hand.

He was marveling at how these things could be, when he heard a quiet purring behind him. Ah, *here's the cat*, he thought and, pleased at his good fortune, he turned around.

Fool that he was! Too late he saw the truth! The giantess had gone away and left him with no ordinary cat, but a great, maned lion, tawny as a bonfire, big as a loaded hay cart, with teeth like ivory daggers. The purr became a growl and the growl a roar, and the beast gathered itself to pounce.

But Anodos bethought himself quicker than a wink. He seized his uncle's ring from among the giant's hoard and sent it rolling across the floor, right under the lion's whiskers. Sure enough, like any

house cat, this cat who lived in the House Up On the Mountain saw everything, and could not resist what seemed to flee from him. He leaped at the ring instead of at Anodos.

Lively as quicksilver, then, Anodos clambered up onto the high, empty seat of the giant's great chair.

The lion had lost interest in the ring as soon as it stopped rolling, and now his tail was lashing back and forth the way gusts before a thunderstorm ripple back and forth across a field of wheat.

Then Anodos seized the duke's iron helmet and flung it at the ravenous lion. It landed right in front of the beast, so the black plumes of its crest actually brushed against the lion's chin. And, just like any house cat, the lion could not resist swiping at the plumes with his great paw. In a trice, Anodos clambered up onto the giant's table.

Now, how, he thought, will I get such a dangerous pet down the mountain without being devoured? There was nothing close at hand except the king's weathervane; and Anodos soon discovered that was fastened to the table so its golden cockerel swung south, west, north—but Anodos could find no way to use it against the lion.

Just then, with a roar like a forest fire, the lion leaped at him. The sharp teeth seized him by the back of his jacket, as if he'd been, himself, no more than a rat. It seemed certain he was done for.

All at once, the giantess came running into the room.

"My husband is home, and he'll smell your blood," she whispered fiercely. "I was a fool to let you in, for now he'll destroy both of us unless you can kill him first!"

She cuffed the lion as if he were a cub, and he dropped Anodos at her feet.

"You must do as I tell you, or we are lost," she commanded. "When he comes in, I will pour him his tankard of ale as I always do, and he will drink it down, as he always does. The first tankard will make him merry, but he'll call for another. The second will make him drowsy, but he'll call for another. The third, if he has it, will make him cruel.

"Before he has it, you must come up behind him, climb up on his back, and drive that walking stick of yours between his ribs, so you pierce his heart. Only thus can you destroy him. Do this and you'll save us both from his wrath, and the cat will go down the mountain with you and never come back to bother me anymore."

Then she showed Anodos where to hide behind a curtain of blood-red velvet. Nor was she a moment too soon. The floor shook with the giant's footfalls, and all the heaps of treasure around the room shuddered. A golden cup rolled off one shelf, and a harp that had been singing quietly to itself fell from another and lay silent.

The giant stalked into the treasure room, flung himself into his chair, and began to berate his wife.

"Here I am, home from a weary day, and no flesh to eat awaits me, nor ale to drink!" His voice echoed around the room like thunder trapped in a mountain pass. "Bring me my victuals, and look sharp about it!"

Anodos, peering out in terror from behind the curtain, saw an enormous fellow wearing trousers pieced from the sails of merchant ships, and a shirt stitched from human skins, with skulls as buttons. He looked as tall as a castle watchtower—far bigger than his wife, who stood no higher than an inn roof. Indeed, just as if she'd been any taproom wench, she hastened to do her husband's bidding.

Then, all went as she had predicted. When the giant had drank down one tankard of ale, he grew merry, teasing the lion with what Anodos thought must be a bell from some cathedral. Then his wife brought him another tankard, and his huge head nodded against his chest.

"Bring me another," he bid her; and though his voice had grown dull, yet it was still loud as a waterfall.

"Strike now," she muttered to Anodos as she passed the curtain; and she took the lion with her when she went out.

In truth, concealed though he was for the time being, Anodos was frightened enough that he had taken his laurel wood staff firmly in hand, bracing himself with the thought that he'd soon be known far and wide as The Giant Killer. The treasure trove all around him

would be his, and the reward he'd come for, as well. His fortune was as good as made.

He set his other hand on the staff, holding it as though it were a spear, and crept forward toward the back of the giant's chair. A snore rolled around the room like the sound of an avalanche in the next valley: He saw he would not be seen until it was too late for the giant to rouse himself.

Anodos pulled himself up once more onto the table. Now, he only had to plunge his weapon into the giant's heart, and everything would be his.

But the laurel staff was warm and smooth between his hands, almost like a living thing, and it recalled to him his dream of the woman with amber hair. *Keep it with you for good*, she'd said of her gift to him; and though it had turned out to be only this poor stick, yet he could not bear to think of it drenched with giant's blood. How could he ever keep it with him if he did as the giantess commanded? So he slid it once more through the strap of the pack he still wore, and stood there hesitating, not knowing what to do.

Just then, the lion at her heels, she came back into the room, with the tankard in one hand and a flagon of ale in the other, for she had not known if he'd succeeded yet in the task she'd set. At the sound of her step, the giant started awake.

"Now I smell man's flesh and ale!" he shouted. And, seizing the flagon, he half-emptied it down his throat. Hiding behind the weathervane on the table, Anodos saw the giant's thirst for blood awaken even before he set the flagon on the floor. "Have you stewed my meat or roasted it?" he shouted. "Have you skewered it or roasted it? However it's done, old woman, see that it's salted, and bring me my bowl full, now!"

"Not stewed nor roasted, not salted nor toasted," the giantess answered. "And I would not talk of skewers, if I were you."

But before the giant could ask what she meant by that insolent remark, the lion spied Anodos behind the stolen weathervane and gathered himself once more to spring. His tail lashed this way and that, and it hit the flagon and knocked it over, and spilled the rest of the ale.

Then the giant let out a roar worse than the lion's own, seized the beast as if it were a helpless kitten, and flung it aside, so it struck the weathervane and spun it around toward the east.

To Anodos's amazement, in that instant the lion changed, and became a cub soft and bright as a new dandelion.

But the giant, too, had seen Anodos, now; and, with a shout, he lurched to his feet and snatched at him. Anodos had scarcely time to snatch up the little cub before the giant seized them both.

"Thief who'd steal my treasure!" he roared. "My teeth grind you with pleasure!" Anodos could see those teeth only too well.

But the giant had stood up too quickly, and his head was reeling with ale. So, instead of devouring Anodos at once, he opened a trap door in the floor, and hurled him, and the lion cub with him, into a pitch-black, icy dungeon, where the Sun's light had never fallen, from the beginning up until that very day.

At first, Anodos thought his fingers and toes would freeze. Yet, he endured it. The lion cub lay curled at his feet like a kitten, shivering just as he did.

Then, by and by, he thought his elbows and knees had turned to ice. That, too, though, he endured. He lifted the cub onto his lap, and it made a little difference for a while. When he felt the cold reaching toward his heart, though, he knew he must do something, or die there as the giant's prisoner. Yet he was so cold, he grew drowsy and drifted toward sleep.

And as he lay there in the giant's dungeon, he thought the woman in green came to his side once more. She said no word this time, but pointed toward the stick of laurel wood. As she pointed, a white petal of flame fell from her finger into the laurel wood.

Then she was gone, and Anodos found himself awake in the dark and cold. He had an idea what he could do, though he wondered

Continued on page 81



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TROOPS

Continued from page 37

placed teeth, and gripping prehensile eyelids. A cummerbund of Tini's had strung themselves across his torso, while far below, Babies Bottles and BeeBee held fast to his ankles. Even as she gaped at this, more toys ran out along the struts of the pentacle and dove off, to grip him wherever they could. Through the faded back wall, Princess Peggy appeared, herding a flock of howling, grunting dinosaurs. "You're right, Annie!" she called. "The magic got to them, too! Now if I can get them to jump!"

"What are you doing?" howled Emmy. "Stop it! This is my job!"

"Now, don't be mad," said Annie. "Stop feeling guilty and think about this clearly for a minute. This is the only way it makes sense."

"Didn't you get it?" demanded Emmy, as Peggy gestured and howled at the dinosaurs—explaining. "Don't you understand? You'll be in there forever, or till the vortex opens again!"

"So would you have been," said Annie. "And how long do you think we'll survive, once the random magic is shut off? By morning we'd be dead plastic and plush again. And you'd be gone. You're a real person, Emmy—you can't run out on your parents and your little brother. Nobody'll miss us."

"I will!" Emmy reached for the vortex, but Annie skated in front of her and slapped at her hands—tiny stings that hurt a surprising amount.

"If you go in there, we're dead," hissed Annie, as a giant purple T. Rex leaped, bounced off the strut of a pentacle, and fell, roaring. "Let us live. This is the only way."

"What have we ever asked of you before?" asked Princess Peggy. "Give us this. Now. And hurry, before he gets his eyes open and that laser comes out again! It already nailed Tot."

The T. Rex landed on the critter's nose and clung with its hind feet, lashing its tail for relief and released one of the eyelids. The dinosaur's huge jaws clamped on before they did more than flicker. A stegosaurus lurched onto the pentacle, walked straight over the vortex, and plummeted.

"All right," said Emmy. "All right. But—" But what? Be careful? She picked Annie up and hugged her, small and vinyl-firm.

Peggy let out a war whoop and led the dinosaurs in rushing the edge of the vortex. With roars and whistles, squeaks and groans, they rained down upon the critter, grabbing on wherever they could find a free space. Annie, set back down on the floor, skated into the middle of the room, turned, and drove herself back toward the closet, skates buzzing as she built up momentum, whizzing past Emmy, legs bent, body forward, jumping at the last possible moment

before the line of the pentacle would have tripped her and sent her spinning out of control. "Geronimo!" she yelled, hurtling down and forward, smacking into the critter above the string of Tini's. Emmy saw them swarm up to catch her, saw Annie clinging to the neon fur, saw them all look up at her for an instant before turning back to the business of embracing their enemy.

Emmy bit her lip and blinked her eyes as she picked up the matches. The jar lid weighted down the poem outside of the closet, the herbs already neatly piled up. They had left nothing for her to get wrong. Except the timing. She could still fail them. Recalling the tree's instructions, she dropped one of the two piles of herbs down the center of the pentacle, then began to read the poem as she opened the matchbook.

The first word sealed the vortex—she could see the sheen, like a layer of plastic. Cautiously, still chanting, she pressed a hand down on the center, until she was sure it would bear the weight of the jar lid. The first match broke, but the second one lit, and stayed lit long enough to catch the green leaves. Smoke rose in the air, stinging her watery eyes. She sniffed, but spoke out strong and as loudly as she dared. When she finished the last word, she started again at the beginning.

The bad-egg smell she had lived with for weeks melted into the smell of burned plants. The orange light faded as the floor hardened. The last Emmy saw of her troops, they had the critter's arms bound to his sides with a chain of plastic bodies, the horses prancing on his head, Jungle Jim and the T. Rex dripping with stagnant yellow goo from the wounds on his face.

The floor closed. No sign of the pentacle or vortex remained; but the gaping hole in the back of the closet was still there, charred at the edges. Emmy continued chanting as the last of the herbs burned up.

Only then did she let go of the tears.

And that was where the sitter found her when she came to put Roy to bed and saw her through the hole in the back of the closet.

"I DON'T KNOW—I DON'T REMEMBER—I don't know—I don't remember." The words were her mantra, her sole line of defense. No one knew where her shoes had gone; no one knew how she had burned a hole in the back of the closet without damaging her clothes, or Roy's, or the floor; no one would ever know what had become of all her toys and half of Roy's. But finding the corpse of Bikey Mikey inclined them to think the worst, and that was the hardest question to keep silent against.

"Why did you destroy all your toys?" asked the doctor. "Did you decide you were too big for them?"

"I wasn't," she muttered, into her clasped hands. "They were too big for me."

And she started crying again, to avoid the follow-up questions. ♦

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TRADITIONAL FANTASY ANY WAY YOU LIKE IT, PLUS SWASHBUCKLING ACTION AND PULP Horror for your computer. Last month in this column, I outlined the history of the dungeon crawl, then urged you to buy *Dungeon Master II*, a game that turns the traditional crawl formula on its head by having you take the role of an evil sorcerer defending his dungeon from invading heroes. Well, this time you're back to playing the hero. *Darkstone*, from Dephine Software Inc. and Gathering of Developers (\$39.95 for PCs), is a classic role-playing computer game in the dungeon-crawl mode with some beautiful graphics and some serious game-play tweaks.

The tradition in role-playing games is that graphics are incidental to the story. It was held that a game with

ated environment. The viewpoint is top-down and over the shoulder, more like *Tomb Raider* than *Quake*, but the picture quality is equal to anything in the current generation of action games.

Once you get over the graphics, the next thing you notice about *Darkstone* is that you get to play two characters. For a Fantasy role-playing game, this is not news. Most FRPGs let you control a party, but that is usually in a turn-based setting where though there are four faces at the bottom of the screen, you experience them as one entity. What makes *Darkstone* different is that your second character has a (computerized) mind of its own. It is smart enough to follow you around and help you out by fighting and casting spells without any prompting from you. You get to pick what artifacts and tools to give it. Equip the second character well enough, and you will find it earning more experience points than your own character.

Controlling the characters is an easy matter of pointing and clicking with the mouse. Hot keys launch certain spells or ready particular weapons. Clicking on the terrain and nonplayer characters (NPCs) causes the terrain to change (doors to open, locks to spin, etc.) and conversations to start. Go to the right places, talk to the right people, and kill the right creatures, and the characters can collect all seven magic crystals they need to empower the

magic orb that is their only chance against Draak, a great, genocidal dragon. The quest takes the characters through 32 dungeons stocked with a hundred different enemies. Nor is the game intended to be played only once. Randomizing is built into the dungeon stocking so that each time you start from scratch, the treasure, monsters, quests, and NPCs have all moved around. If two characters doesn't seem like enough to tackle all the danger in *Darkstone's* dungeons, you can go on the Internet or over a LAN and team with three other



In 7th Sea, Alderac Entertainment Group's newest game, pirates and sword-fighting abound.

a good background and a variety of challenges didn't need to render those challenges in the detail of simulation games. This tradition is wearing away as more and more computers ship with 3-D accelerator cards as basic equipment. *DMII* has a first-person, 3-D mode, and *Darkstone* is a fully accel-



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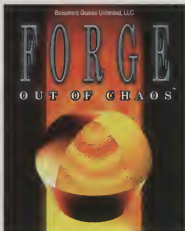
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While not in the same class of originality as *DKII*, *Darkstone* is a fine game in all other ways. It transports you to a detailed Fantasy world and turns you loose to save humanity. What could be better?

How about a traditional dungeon crawl in a paper-and-dice RPG? That is exactly what you get with *Forge: Out of Chaos* from Basement Games Unlimited (202 pgs.). It's really hard to write a paper-and-dice dungeon-crawl game; much harder than to write a computer one for the simple reason that the genre was invented with the paper-and-dice game, *Dungeons and Dragons*. If you publish a computer FRPG, your game can be compared to this or that other computer FRPG, but there is no Ur-computer game that you constantly will be measured against. On the other hand, it is impossible to publish



a paper-and-dice FRPG and not be compared to *D&D*. Some games, like *Rune Quest* or *Ars Magica*, only remind players a little of *D&D*. Other games remind players a lot of *D&D*. Usually, the more focus that a game places on killing monsters, looting treasure, and gaining experience points, the more people (particularly reviewers like me) are going to compare it to *D&D*. *Forge* puts its emphasis squarely on earning experience and gaining levels; it is firmly in the *D&D* tradition.

The truth is that exploring, killing, looting, and getting better is a powerful paradigm, as the hundreds of thousands of copies sold of *D&D* and its computer-based spawn prove. From the time it was introduced, players have reacted to *D&D* by saying, "This is really good, but it needs to be tweaked here ... and here. And here." This is the mind-set that seems to drive



The 7th Sea Players Guide includes full color paintings of the seven nations of *7th Sea* by artist Terese Nelson.

Forge, although "complete overhaul" probably better describes work the designers did than "tweak."

The world book section of *Forge* is brief and right up front. It is mythic, telling the history of the gods of the *Forge* universe and laying out how the world came to look the way it does today. This background on the way, the designers get down to the player creation. More background is scattered in with the race descriptions and the monster writeups, but the basic *Forge* book is mostly a game engine to which the world is added in other supplements. An impressive amount of background, scenarios, and settings are available at Basement Games pay-for-play Web site, as well as in paper-and-ink supplements.

The game engine is a reasonably complex take on how Fantasy characters fight and cast spells. There are nine Characteristics which are rolled for each character on two six-sided dice. A 10-sided die is also rolled to determine the decimal place of the rating. The gaining of experience is traced using the dec-



imal place, but otherwise a 12.4 Strength is the same as having a 12 Strength. There are 11 races for the players to choose from, and there is no attempt to play-balance them. If you want to hack things to pieces, be one of the cyclopean Ghantu. If you want to cast spells, be one of the reptilian Kithsara.

Skills are divided into three classes: basic, percentage, and leveled. Basic skills are for background; they never get better. Percentage skills are the normal, everyday adventurers' skills; they get easier to perform successfully the more they are used. Leveled skills are the combat and magic skills. They get easier to perform the more they are used, but every time you "master" them, they go up a level and you start over. The higher the level the more effective the skill is in addition to being easier to use.

Magic is complex and varied in *Forge*. There are two types, divine and pagan, one based on the gods and the other on the elements. Within the types are sub-categories of attack and creation magic. Magic is a leveled skill, and the spell lists are done by level, but each magic user can pick different spells. In addition the duration and strength of the spells is rolled at the time they are bought, so that even two magic users with the same spell at the same level may have very different effects.

And, of course, a dungeon crawl is no fun if there aren't monsters to kill and magic to gain, so about a quarter of the *Forge* rule book is devoted to monsters and magic items. Added to the rest of the book, you have a very playable game, but to really get the feel and scope of the "official" world, you'll need to check out the Basement Games Web site.

I have never met anyone who was completely satisfied with *D&D's* rules. If you aren't either, particularly if you think that *D&D's* rules are too simple, that they rob combat of its necessary complexity and realism, then you should have a look at *Forge*.

Speaking of *Dungeons and Dragons*, a new product is now out for the corner of the *D&D* empire that is the planet of Abeir-Toril, home of the Forgotten Realms. The *Forgotten Realms Interactive Atlas* from TSR (on PC CD-ROM) contains all the maps ever published of the Forgotten Realms plus several brand-new ones. They are done up in Pro Fantasy's terrific *Campaign Cartographer* format, and can be edited with the program or with the map editor that was included in the *AD&D Core Rules* CD-ROM.

Basically what this cute little disk lets you do is open up a global map of the whole of the Forgotten Realms, and then start clicking on hot points to bring up maps of regions, cities, buildings, and dungeons. Once you find the local you want, you can modify it or leave it as is. Since the data on the maps is in layers, you can print out a general version for your players and a detailed one for yourself. The maps are in full color, so you will need a color printer to get the full effect, but most of the maps are serviceable even in black and white.

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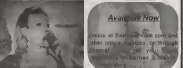
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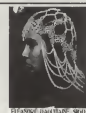
If you are a *Forgotten Realms* DM and particularly if you have copy of *Campaign Cartographer* but never seem to find the time to make any maps with it, then this is the package for you. With all these maps as a springboard, you can't help but make more interesting cities and dungeons.

So much for dungeon crawling. How about dueling and swinging from the chandeliers? These are the order of the day in *7th Sea*, the new game of swashbuckling adventure from Alderac Entertainment Group. The basic *7th Sea* rules are contained in a player's guide and a GM's guide, each hardcover, and each running to 250 pages and costing \$30.00. Together the books lay out how to make characters and run adventures in the world of Theah. Just as AEG's *Legend of the Five Rings* is a medieval Japanese background set in a made-up world, *7th Sea* is a 17th-century European background set in a made-up world. Avalon replaces England, Montaigne stands in for France, Eisen for Germany, and so on. This allows the designers to invent their own history, their own characters, their own magic, and their own religion.

The system for *7th Sea* is a slightly simplified, but much less deadly, version of the *Lot5R* system. Battles in *Lot5R* are usually won by whoever hits first. *7th Sea* allows for player characters to take many hits before suffering any "dramatic wounds." Enough dramatic wounds result in first crippling (minutes to the character's rolls) and then unconsciousness. Because *7th Sea* is a drama-based, swashbuckling game, there is no mechanic for killing player characters in combat. Once they are unconscious and if they are left in the control of the story's villain, then he or she may kill them, but is far more likely to put them in chains or in a deathtrap or some other dramatic situation. Like the heroes of the books and movies set in the 17th-century (Captain Blood, the Three Musketeers, etc.), just because the characters have managed to get the stuffing beaten out of them doesn't mean the story is over.

The first thing I did when I opened up *7th Sea* was try to find the weapons list. I had to consult the Index to find it, and I was disappointed to see that it was very short. There are only eight weapons on it. How could you have a game where a lot of the emphasis is on epic, heroic duels when there are only two kinds of swords listed in the weapons list? It turns out that the answer is fencing school. Just as each clan has its style of swordsmanship in *Lot5R*, each nation in *7th Sea* has its school of fencing; thus, although two characters may be using the same weapon, they will fight in two different styles.

7th Sea is a good, workable system published in two good-looking books with some very good art. It has an interesting background in a good genre. Playing it right after *Forge*, however, you can't help but notice that it doesn't have either a monster or a treasure list. One of the archetypes is "archeologist"



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and one of the game's hooks is looking for Symeth (the lost race that inhabited Theah before man) artifacts. There is a list of already-discovered Symeth sites in the GM's book, but no list of what might be found in a new site. Several of the game's NPCs are described as having and using magical artifacts, but these items are not slated up. Even more than with *Forge*, you are going to need the game's supplements to play in the official game universe.

From swashbuckling to pulp Horror. *Nocturne* from Terminal Reality Inc. (PC CD-ROM) is a role-playing game that is meant to scare you while letting you gun down all sorts of supernatural horrors. It is the 1930s in *Nocturne* and you play "The Stranger," an agent for the Spookhouse, the top-secret government agency in charge of investigating the supernatural. Packing your pair of nickel-plated .45s, you move from chapter to chapter of the story, talking to other characters, killing monsters, and being scared out of your seat. *Nocturne* was designed to be played in a dark room with its stereo sound turned way up. *Nocturne* was also designed to devour your system's resources.

Since I upgraded to a Pentium II, 350 computer with 64 megs of RAM last year, *Nocturne* is the first game I have encountered that actually made my system work. The load wasn't helped by the fact that my review copy didn't support my Voodoo II 3-D cards. I'm sure by its release, the drivers will be out for Voodoo, but forcing this game to run on a machine with less RAM than it wanted and without a video card made for a jerky, low-resolution experience. Even with enough RAM and the right drivers, *Nocturne*'s game-play would have annoyed me. You use the arrow keys to direct "The Stranger," but he doesn't move in a real 3-D world. Instead he moves about the screen through a series of set locations as in a traditional RPG. For instance, the train car on which the story starts is divided into three "sets." To get from the back of the car to the front, you have to move across the screen to the end of one set, wait for the next to load, move across the screen to the end of it, wait for the next set to load, and then move down that last one. All this jerky-jerky movement wears on you, particularly when you are fleeing some nasty, and have to wait for him to enter the set that has just loaded instead of being able to shoot him while he is still safely off screen.

On the plus side, the story of *Nocturne* is long, complicated, interesting, and frightening. Werewolves, zombies, and all sorts of other supernatural nastiness abound. There is no soundtrack in many sections, so the ambient (spooky) noises are all that are heard. If your computer is up to the task, and if you can detach yourself from the first-person shooter mind-set that those twin .45s seem to want you to adopt, then *Nocturne* will be a very good game for you... particularly if you like shaking in your seat. **A-**

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Continued from 41

"I've heard about the Sight," he says to me.
"I've never met anyone with it before."

I doubt that, but he prob'ly never know'd.
"You see everything from their perspective,
don't you? The whole battle. Everything.
Even the moment they die."

I slip on the gloves. They's soft. I kin work
with em on.

"You think," he ask, "maybe we could try
to photograph what you see?"

Then I pull the gloves off. I cain't owe this
man no favor. "No."

"Why not?"

"You see anythin when I was down? Hear
anythin?"

He frowns. They's a small crease in his
forehead that's gonna grow deeper the older
he gets. "No."

"No one does cept the person with the
Sight. It ain't sumpin someone else kin
share."

His shoulders slump. I hand him the
gloves. His face turns bright red. "Oh, no,"
he says. "Those weren't a bribe. I just wanted
to help, that's all."

"Why?"

"You need the work, don't you?" They's
some understandin in his eyes. Not enough.
But some. It ain't like them Reb eyes, all
hatey and nasty. They's a kindness here.

"That box a your'n, it make you see things
clear, don't it?"

They's a little smile on his face, sad, but not
as sad as Dawson's. "Not as clear as your
Sight, I suspect."

That's true nuff.

"I would like to capture what you see," he
says. "Maybe someday, I could hire you and
we could experiment—"

"No," I says.

"Why not?" he ask.

Dawson put the body, the one I touched,
on the litter. The boy's skull is small. They's
a nick in the front and a hole in the back the
size a my fist. His wife ain't never gonna see
this body, ain't never gonna know just how
he died. She's gonna tell her boy what a hero
Daddy was and how glorious he died,
fightin for the cause.

She ain't gonna know about the lies he told
and the fear eatin his belly and the last days
in the dirt and the heat and the stink.

"Coz sometimes," I says, "you kin see too
clear."

He stares at me for a long minute. His eyes
is the same green as Dawson's. I'm thinkin
maybe I'm gonna have ta splain what I mean
when he stands up.

"This is thankless work," he says, maybe
meanin to be kind.

I look at the bodies stretched from here ta
the grove where the Cold Harbor tavern still
stands. Bodies waitin for someone ta tend
em, waitin for someone ta care.

"It ain't thankless," I say. "It jus hard." ♦

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if it could really be what she wanted of him, after all. He felt himself grown numb and dull with cold. But he was young, and not ready to die.

So he took the laurel stick in his hands, and split it apart over his knee, and rubbed the pieces together until a petal of flame budded there, and thus he made a fire of it. And the fire burned all through the night. Anodos and his cub slept soundly in its small circle of warmth.

When he awoke, the air in the stone dungeon was growing warm, and pale light was seeping in around a door he saw now for the first time. The laurel stick had burned down to white ashes. Anodos took some up in his left hand, wondering if he should try, somehow, to keep them. The ashes were smooth and light, but there was no heat left in them.

But underneath where they had been, lying in the last of the laurel ash as if in a drift of snow, he spied a golden key. Anodos seized it with his right hand and leaped up, and the lion cub uncurred from its sleep and yawned, and went with him to the door of the cell.

The Sun was rising, white as a laurel blossom, and the golden key unlocked the dungeon. Anodos and the cub stepped out into the misty air and hastened away from the House Up On the Mountain.

But Anodos began to be troubled by the handful of ash he carried. He knew this was not what the woman in his dream had meant for him to keep. He heard a stream running nearby, though, by and by, so he took all he had left of the laurel stick, and went to the stream, and lowered his cupped hand into the water so the ashes swirled away and his hand was clean.

Then, saddened and wondering, he went on toward the town to collect his reward.

The quiet old trees gave way to smaller, newer woods, and the woods gave way to rocky pastures, and the pastures to well-kept fields and, with the lion cub romping here and there around him, well before noon he finally saw ahead the open gateway of the town.

To his amazement, though, when he made his way to the place where the windowless house had stood, he found instead a delightful villa, all carved wood and open windows, with gardens of sunflowers and chamomile and sky blue morning glories set amid a park of oaks and well-kept beds of laurel.

The door of the villa stood open, and when he approached, she stood there in the doorway—the woman of his dream, dressed in green, with hair like brown amber.

"I have brought the cat from the House Up On the Mountain," Anodos said, and they were the first words he had spoken aloud since he set out. "I have come to free a prisoner, but I see no prisoner here."

"I was the prisoner," she said to him, and her voice was as he remembered it. "The

giant and his wicked wife had torn my soul from my body, and locked it in the windowless house; and my body they had changed to the dry, twisted stick you found in the forest.

"And you could not kill either rat or giant with the laurel stick, for I am sworn not to kill. And you could not use it to batter your way into the house of mirrors, for your own form was reflected there, and I am sworn not to destroy what is beautiful.

"But you could lean on the laurel staff on your steepest journey, and so we have traveled together. And you could use it to speak for you when you had no voice—though it could not speak for itself, it could speak for you—and so we have worked together. And you kept yourself alive through your darkest night with the fire you lit within it, and so we have warmed each other.

"And thus you were yourself used, forasmuch as you saved me from this evil enchantment: For when the ashes were thrown into the water, my true body was restored to me."

And the young man saw that all she said was true.

"Now, come," she invited. "The cup we shared in your dream awaits within."

So they went into that sunny dwelling together, and the lion cub played around their feet as they feasted, and they all lived happily ever after. ♣

EDITORIAL

Continued from page 6

the book wasn't cast by Gandalf, but by Tolkien's imagination and narrative. For two days I was no longer in jail, no longer surrounded by an 11'x7' box of solid concrete, a toilet/sink combination, a two-inch thick "mattress," and a number of screaming, angry people. I was "free" to explore all the places and inhabitants of Middle Earth. For two days, I was part of a mental "jail break," allowed to "escape," if only for a short time.

Eight years later, in an ultimate case of irony, I've become the librarian for eleven-hundred inmates. During my four years at this post, the size of the library has grown exponentially and, of course, the Fantasy genre is very well represented.

Though my actions have alienated me from several social circles, the Fantasy genre has given me the impression of acceptance. I'm allowed to adventure freely as just another of the many diverse denizens that inhabit the equally multi-faceted environments.

We all enjoy Fantasy for various reasons, but I believe that many of our justifications overlap, creating a collective chain of kinship. I love Fantasy because it is the complete opposite to my real life existence. Though I have favorites in the genre, I am thankful to all the creators, and contributors, that have built and continue to develop the fantastic universes where I spend a lot of my time. ♣

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Contributors.

H EINZ INSU FENKL is the author of *Memories of my Ghost Brother*, an autobiographical novel about growing up as a bi-racial child in Korea in the '60s. The son of a German-American soldier and a Korean black marketeer, he was raised in Korea, Germany, and the U.S. He currently lives in Michigan with his wife, the writer Anne B. Dalton, and their daughter. In addition to being co-author of the *Realms* Folkroots column with Terri Windling, his work includes short stories and nonfiction published in a variety of magazines. He was named a Barnes and Noble "Great New Writer" and was a PEN/Hemingway finalist in 1997. Heinz says the "Angels and Aliens" piece could really be a whole book. "The theoretical work has already been done rather thoroughly, but it appears no one has actually done the job of compiling a cross-cultural and trans-historical collection of abduction narratives in literature and folklore."

RESA NELSON attended graduate school at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, earning a Master's in sport management. She is currently a technical writer for Oracle Computer Corp. in Boston. Resa is a graduate of the 1985 Clarion Science Fiction Writer's Workshop. She has sold stories to *Science Fiction Age*, *Aboriginal*, and *Pulp-house*. She has written two novels that she is trying to sell.

NOREEN DOYLE lives in a small town in Maine, where she does not attend the historical society. She has a story slated for editor Dawn Albright's upcoming *Dimensions of Madness* anthology. Her thesis (completed at last!) may be published by an academic press. This story for *Realms* is not based on an existing spell from *The Book of the Dead*, although the historical setting is accurate and at the root of it is, of course, Egyptian myths ... albeit this time with a slight time warp.

LOIS TILTON's short fiction has most recently appeared in anthologies from DAW and Baen Books; her next story will be in the January issue of *Asimov's*.

ANNA KIRWAN is a professional editor, published poet, and author of *The Jewel of*



Peni Griffith



Richard Parks

Life, a Harcourt Brace book. She has also written three middle-grade books about life in France in the Middle Ages.

STEVEN ADLER grew up in Peekskill, NY. He attended the Rhode Island School of Design, studied independently in Rome, and has been a professional illustrator since 1984. Recent projects include Fantasy covers for AvoNova and Viking Books, a Celestial Seasonings tea box, and a new illustrated logo for the Barbados Tourism Authority. Steve has been exhibiting his paintings in galleries in northern Virginia near his home in Sperryville.

KRISTINE KATHRYN RUSCH wrote "Burial Detail" for *Civil War Fantastic*, a Marty Greenberg anthology that will be released in the summer of 2000. She has had a great year—selling four books in four different genres (Mystery, SF, Fantasy, and Romance) under different names. She won the Homer award for *Echea* and three different reader's choice awards for three different stories in three different magazines in three different genres.

RICHARD PARKS is a Mississippi storyteller. Atypical of the breed, he cannot tell a lie with a straight face, and so he has to write them all down. Some of his better fits have appeared in *Asimov's*, *Science Fiction Age*, *Realms*, and *Dragon Magazine*. He lives with a wife and three cats who don't believe a word he says, except on his birthday and certain designated major holidays. (From the introduction to "Notes From the Bridge," *Blood Muse*, Donald I. Fine, Inc., edited by Esther Friesner.)

PENI R. GRIFFIN's childhood was spent reading and taking long car trips as her family moved from Texas to Alaska, Alaska to Iowa, Iowa to Maryland, and Maryland back to Texas. She is the author of *Margo's House*, as well as the Edgar-nominated mystery *The Treasure Bird*.

KAREN HABER is the author of eight novels. Her short fiction has appeared in *Asimov's*, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and various anthologies. In her secret identity as an art journalist, she reviews art books for *Locus* and has profiled many of the top artists in the SF and Fantasy fields. ■



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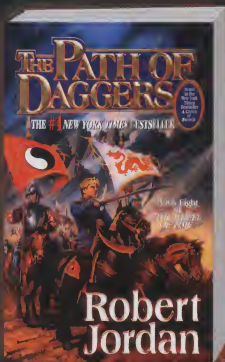
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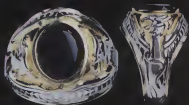
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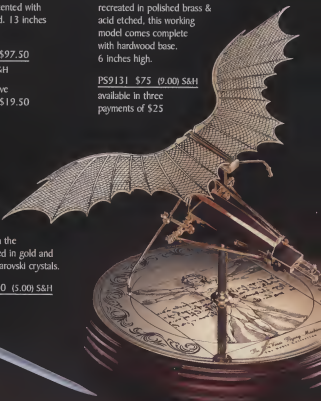
Holiday 1999

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